



What is Ethnography

Introduction to Ethnographic
Research

Jean J. Schensul, Ph.D.

Institute for Community Research

www.incommunityresearch.org

Prepared for CIRA M & B Core, July, 2005



Goals for Today



- Introduction to main components of ethnographic research
- Developing research questions
- Developing a research model
- Outlining an ethnographic “proposal”
- Self-assessment



Outline



- I. What is Ethnography?
- II. Ethnographic research questions
- III. Research modeling
- IV. Building blocks of ethnographic research
- V. Developing a research design
- VI. Proposal outline
- VII. Analytic Aids
- VIII. Organizational Supports
- IX. Who should do ethnographic research





I. What is Ethnography

- Inquiry (asking questions)
- Discovery (discovering new things)
- Exploration and description/
confirmation or discovery of
relationships among variables
(developing and testing hypotheses)





Ethnography is about Communities



- **Geographically situated**
- **Problem or topic oriented**
- **Involves participation in the life of the “community”**
- **May contribute to issue clarification or to pointing to directions for targeted social change**
- **Ethnography involves.....**



- research in a natural setting
 - Intimate face to face interaction with participants;
-
- accurate reflection of participants' perspectives and behaviors;
 - utilizes multiple data sources qualitative and quantitative
 - inductive, interactive and recursive data collection
 - analytic strategies to build local cultural theories;
 - frames behavior and action in socio-political and historical context;
 - uses concept of culture as a lens through which to interpret results.





Qualitative/Quantitative Research Differences

Qualitative Research

- Describes the quality of phenomena
- Is primarily inductive – builds theory
- Uses text based data derived from observations, interviews and elicitation
- Focus of study is localized
- Unit of analysis is usually larger than the individual
- Usually uses universal or selective sampling
- Emphasizes validity
- Uses case-study/continuous assessment design in interventions

Quantitative Research

- Measures the quantity of phenomena
- Is primary deductive - tests theory
- Uses numerical data based on quantification
- Focus of study is local, national or international
- Unit of analysis is usually the individual
- Randomizes sampling procedures
- Emphasizes reliability and generalizability
- Uses experimental or quasi-experimental design in a controlled settings



What surveys do



- Surveys can test hypotheses that predict change in a population over time.
- Surveys are useful in demonstrating national and local trends





When to Call Upon Qualitative/Ethnographic and Case Study Approaches

- When the problem is not clear (new public health problem).
- When we don't know why something happens
- When the domain is not well understood
- When the target population is not identified.
- When random sampling does not capture range of variation.
- When there is a disjuncture between what people know and what they do
- When respondents (or researchers) don't trust surveys
- When new approaches to intervention are required.
- When an intervention has unexpected processes or outcomes
- When the research design is not a good fit
- When new trends emerge that are not included in existing surveys
- When people want their story told
- When a perspective is not represented
- When lifestyles vary
- When traditional measures do not address causes and consequences of inequalities





II. Ethnographic Research Questions



- Differences among people (ethnicity, age, residential situation, etc.) (predictors)
- Different behaviors, cultural beliefs, attitudes, norms, risks (outcomes)
- Relationships (processes)
- Processes (community, organizational, problem solving, decision making etc.)
- Structures (policies, norms, rules, etc.)
- Historical factors (background variables)
- Statuses (health, educational, economic, political)



How Do We Generate Questions?



- Reading
- Invention
- Observation
- Discrepancy and conflict
- Change over time (trends)
- Others' questions or observations
- Interdisciplinary or cross situation comparisons



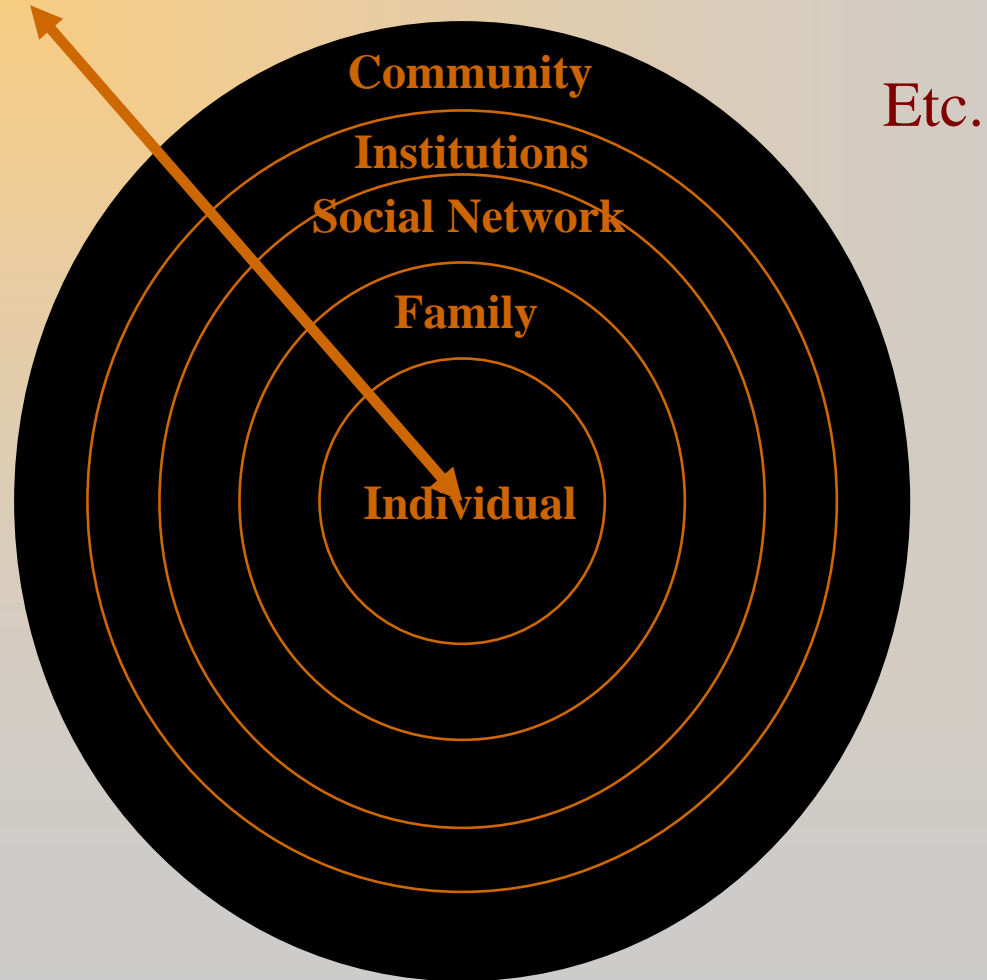
III. Research Modeling



- Core domain and related domains
- Dependent domain and Predictor domains
- Systems variables and individual level predictors
- Ecological Modeling as a useful tool

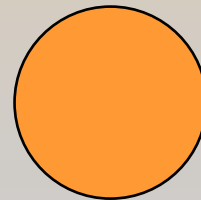
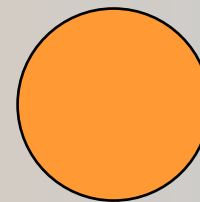
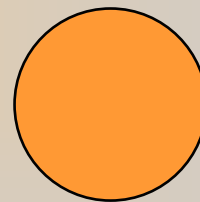
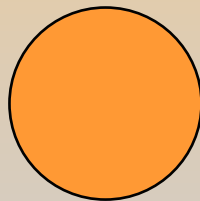
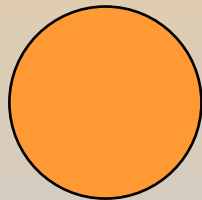
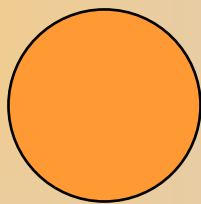
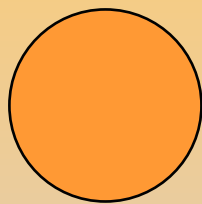


Ethnographic Social Science (ethno-logic)

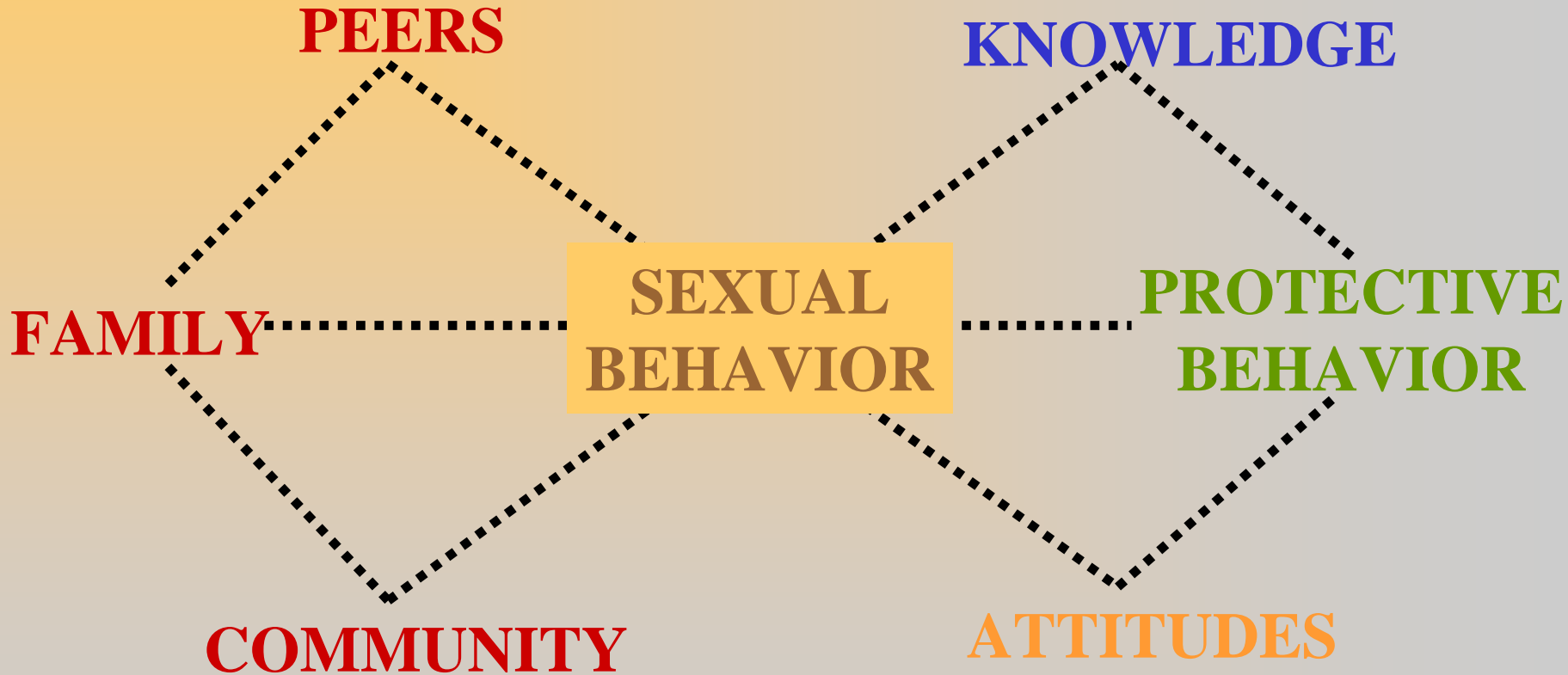




Generating an Initial Model



The Initial Research Model





V. Developing a Research Design: Components



- Formative Model
- Research questions and/or initial hypotheses
- Selection of Methods
 - Phase I (qualitative)
 - Phase II (quantitative)
- Sampling protocols and options



IV. Building Blocks of Ethnographic Research



A. Introduction to community

B. Exploratory

A. Unstructured data collection

A. Observation and social mapping

B. Key informant interviews

C. Participant observation

B. Semi-structured data collection

A. Interviews – and sorts

B. Observations



C. Confirmatory

A. Structured

A. Systematic Observations

B. Surveys





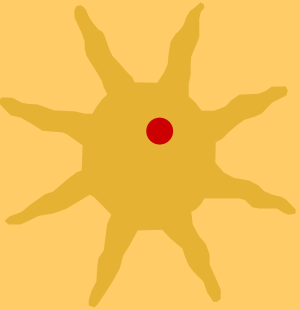
Other types of data



- Archival data
- Photographic, video or film data
- Other forms of elicitation data (using collages, photographs, etc.)
- Life histories, personal narratives

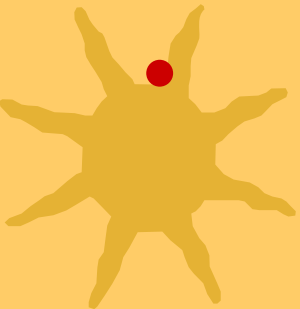


Stages In Ethnographic Research



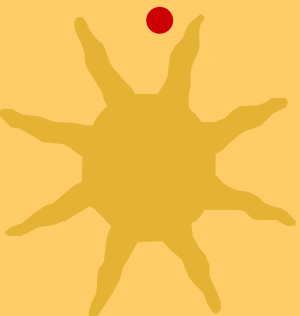
Exploratory Data Collection

- Open ended data collection methods



Definitional

- Semi-structured Data Collection

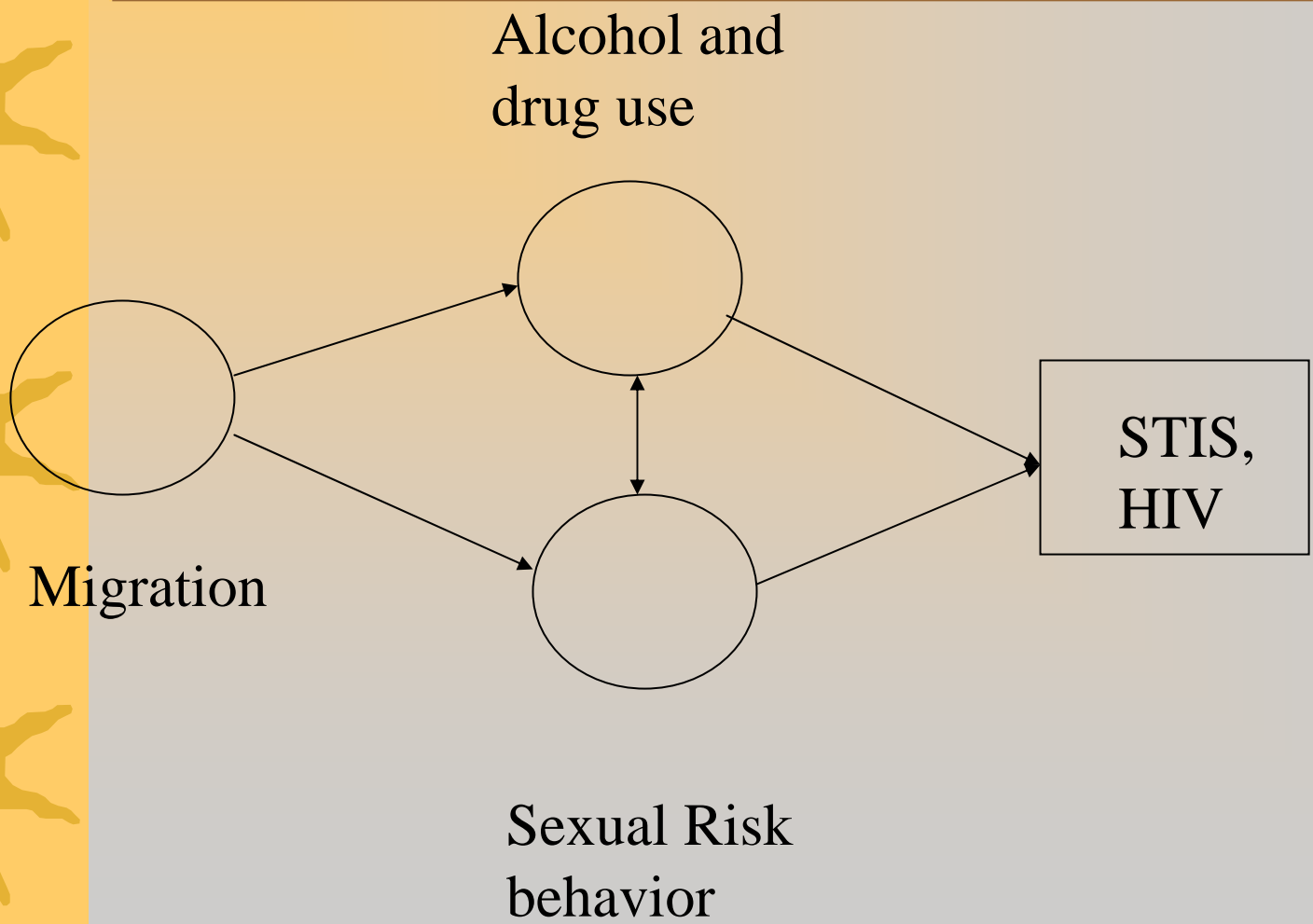


Confirmatory

- Ethnographic Surveys and other quantifiable data collection methods



Exploratory (other domains?)



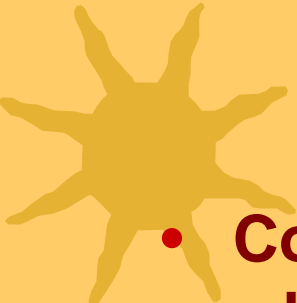


Exploratory Data Collection: Methods and Purpose

- Key informant interviews
- Open-ended observations
- Photo-documentation
- Informal group interviews in field settings
- Archival
- Locate primary research domains;
- identify primary sampling units
- discover how to bound the sample
- find maximum range in each unit
- build research model



Exploratory Data Collection: Types of Selection



- **Convenience - whoever is available**



- **Reputational case selection**

- **Chain referral selection**



- **Bellwether case selection**

- **When representation doesn't matter**
- **recommendations from individuals**
- **selection for specific characteristics**
- **selection for optimal conditions**

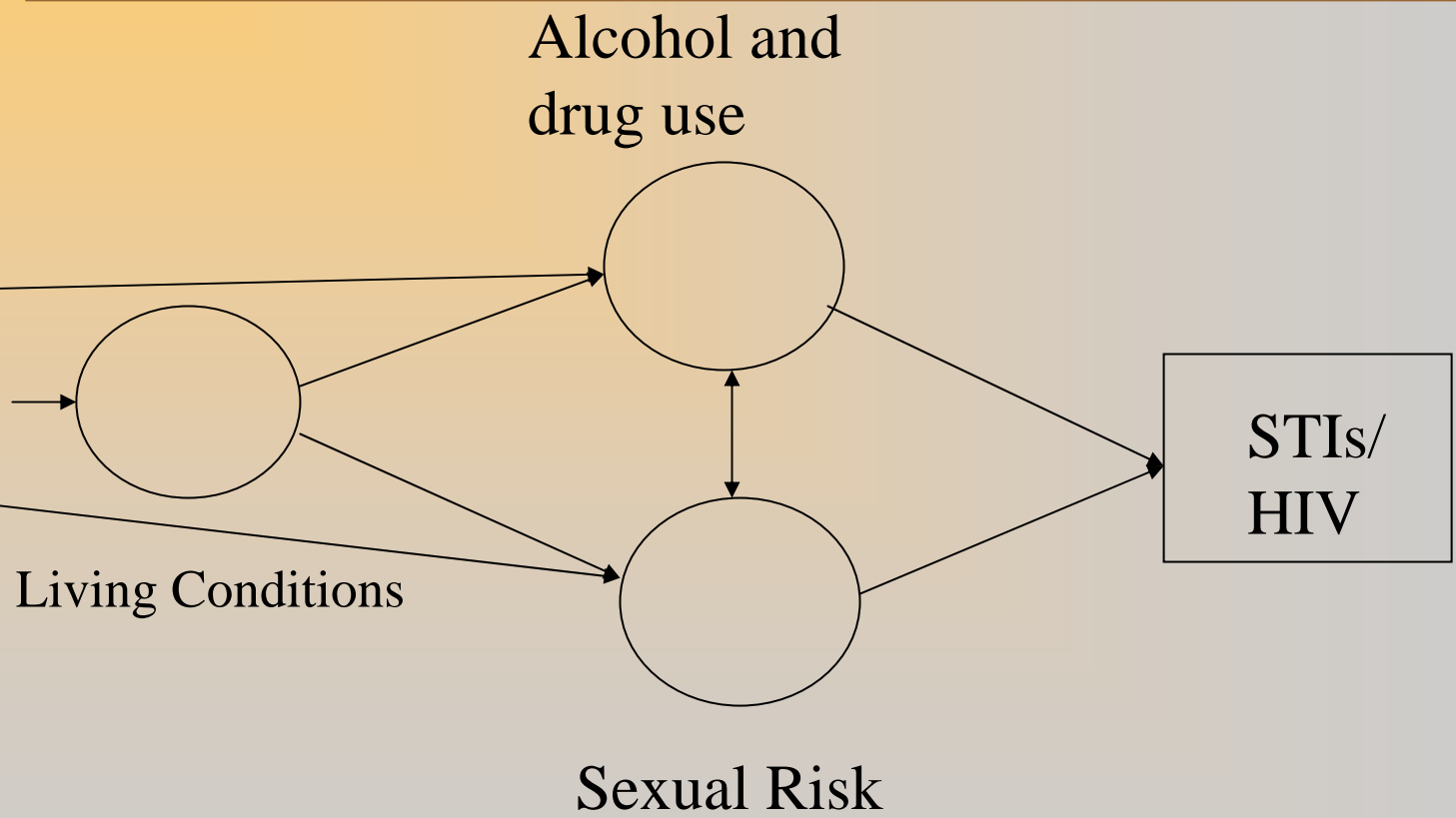


Definitional Data Collection

(differentiation within Domains)



Migration





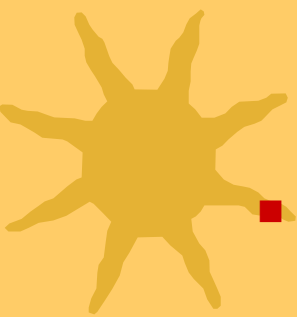
Semi-structured Data Collection: Purpose and Methods



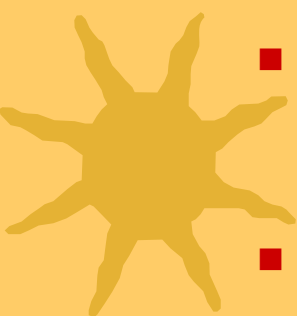
- Structured, open-ended interview schedule
- focused group interviews
- structured, open-ended observations
- elicitation (systematic) data collection techniques – cultural level
- Archival
- elucidate model domains
- differentiate domains into factors, subfactors and variables
- explore and hypothesize relationships
- define items or attributes of variables



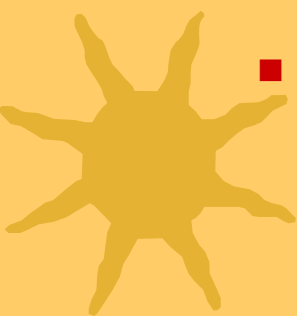
Semi-Structured Data Collection: Case Selection For Variation:



- Extreme-dichotomous
- Ends of a defined continuum



- Typical
- Based on known “average” or most common

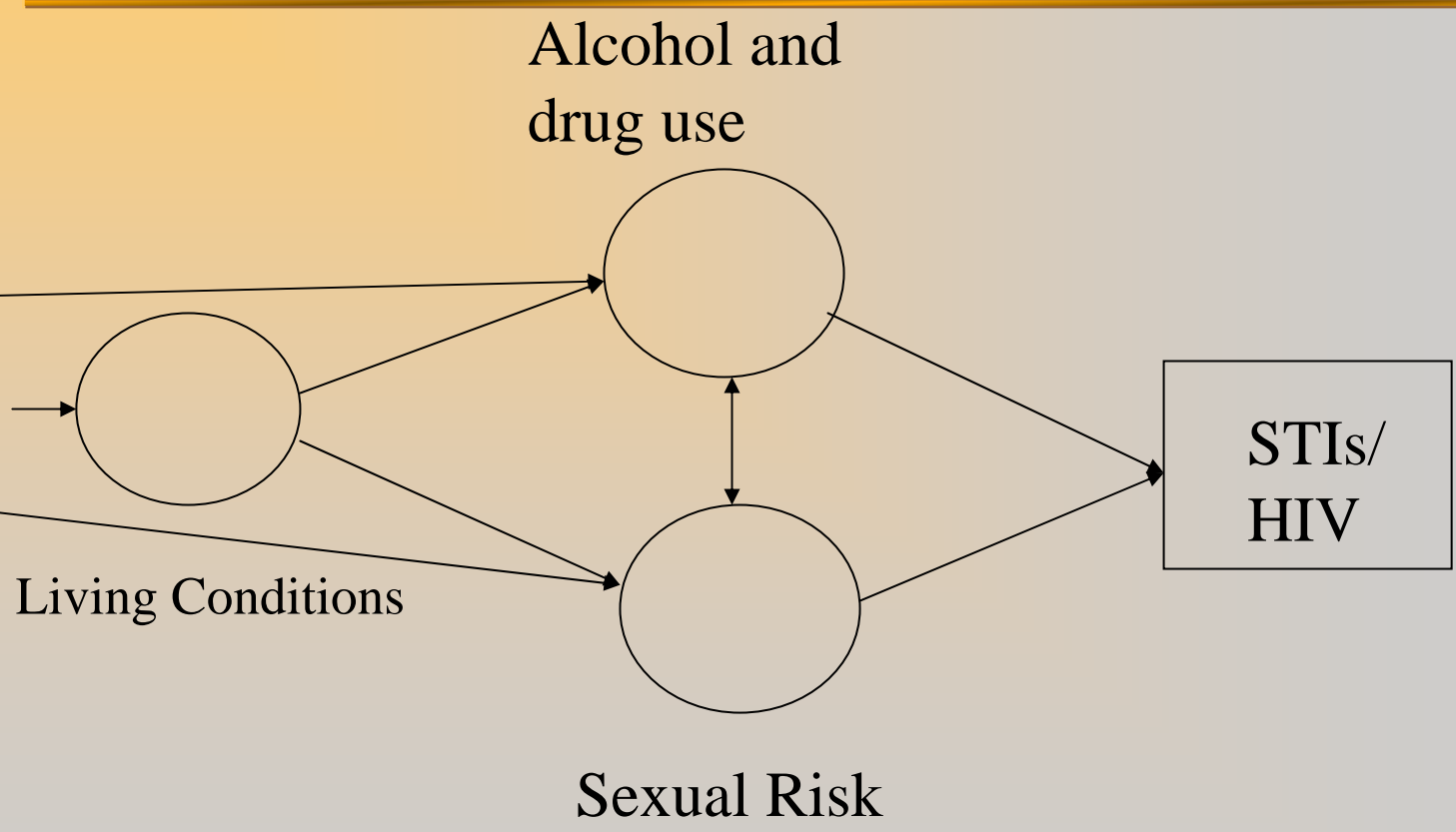


- Intensive
- Geographic concentration
- Unique case selection:
- Unique or unusual



Confirmatory Data Collection

(Predicting relationships in a sample)





Structured Data Collection: Probability Sampling



To determine whether patterns and variations found in smaller groups are represented in the study population; to test hypotheses using surveys or systematic coded observations (or photography)



- Systematic Sampling
- Random Sampling





Structured Data Collection: Probability Sampling



■ **Systematic Sampling**

- identification of units based on intervals
- used in naturalistic settings when units are known and the sample is prospective
- Examples:
 - interactive behaviors in daycares
 - clinic patients with asthma
 - people's reactions to natural disasters

■ **Probability Sampling**

- randomized identification of units based on known universe
- used in settings where all units are known and available
- Variations:
 - simple
 - stratified
 - cluster



EXPLORE

DOMAIN: THE FAMILY

DOMAIN: WORK



DEFINE

FACTOR: ECONOMICS

FACTOR: WORK



SUBFACTOR: NONE

SUBFACTOR: FINANCIAL
BENEFITS



CONFIRM:

VARIABLE: REASON FOR
WORKING

VARIABLE: INCOME

ITEM: SUPPORT FAMILY

ITEM: AMOUNT





Quantification of Qualitative Data



-
- Surveys
 - Structured observations on sampled units
 - Network research



Data Management



- Organizing – filing system
- Transcribing
- Coding – coding system
- Software preferences
- Location
- Security of fieldnotes and other materials
- Confidentiality



VII. Analytic aids



- Guttman and other cultural level scaling techniques
- Maps
- Conceptual mapping and flow charting
- Computerized data management/analysis packages
- Triangulation



Data Management Table



Research Question	Type of Data	Collected From	Form of the Data	Status of Data	



VIII. Organizational support



- Staffing
- Training
- Timeline
- Ethical considerations
- Budget



VI. Proposal Outline: key components



- Introduction
- Argument/logic
- Research Questions
- Formative Model (and hypotheses_
- Research design
 - Concepts
 - Setting (community/school)
 - Units of analysis and Sampling
 - Methods of data collection and relationship to research questions, model and hypotheses)
- Data Management and Analysis



IX. Who Should Do Ethnographic Research (and who should not)



- Communications skills
- PO capacity
- Capacity to live in difficult or different circumstances
- Capacity to suspend judgment
- Capacity to leave disciplinary or other biases behind
- Going the extra mile
- Looking first for differences and the reasons why