

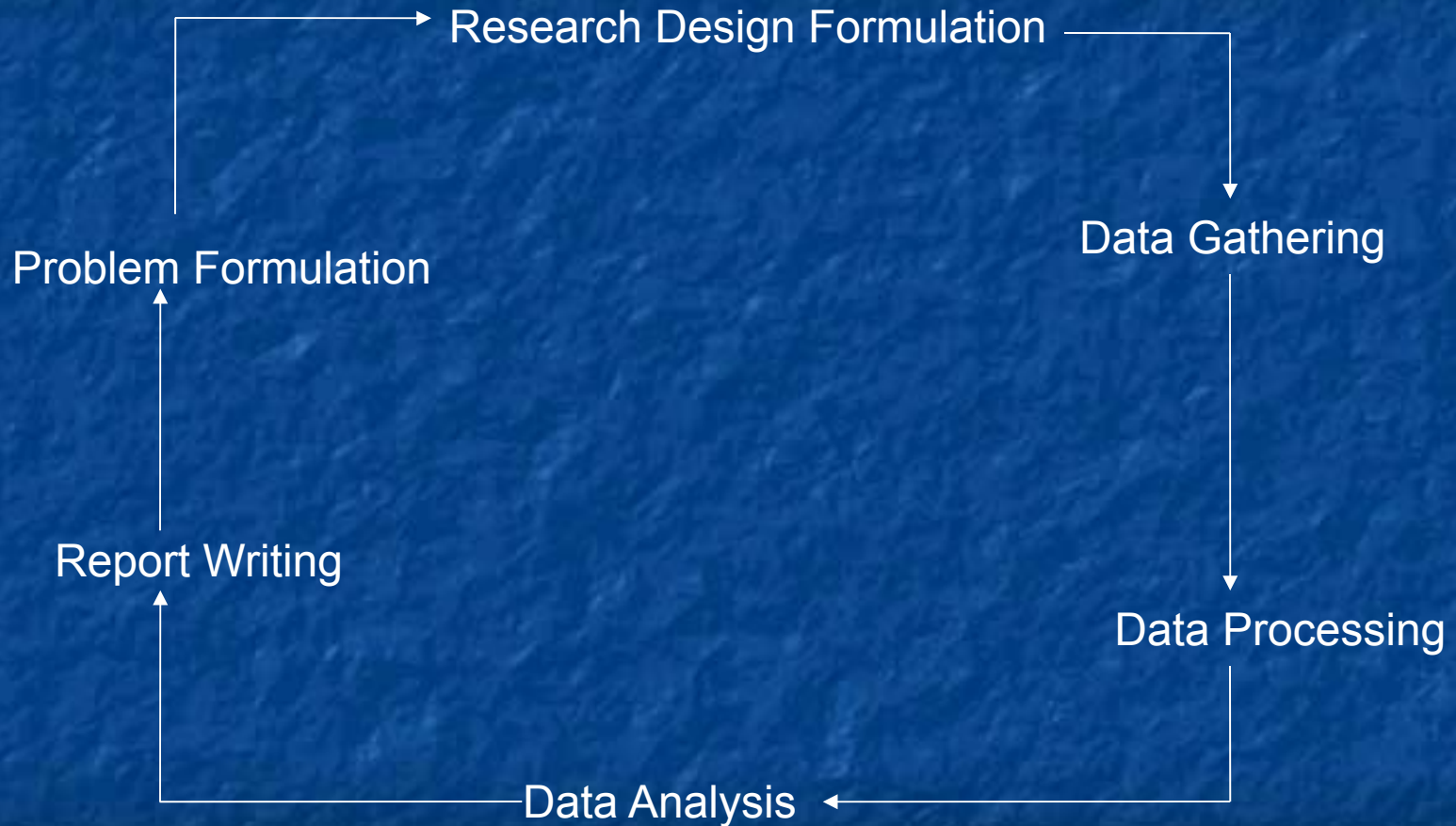
RESEARCH PROBLEM FORMULATION

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Objectives:

1. To appreciate the challenges faced by researchers when formulating a researchable problem
2. To learn the difference between a researchable problem and one that is not
3. To apply the principles learned by formulating an actual research problem

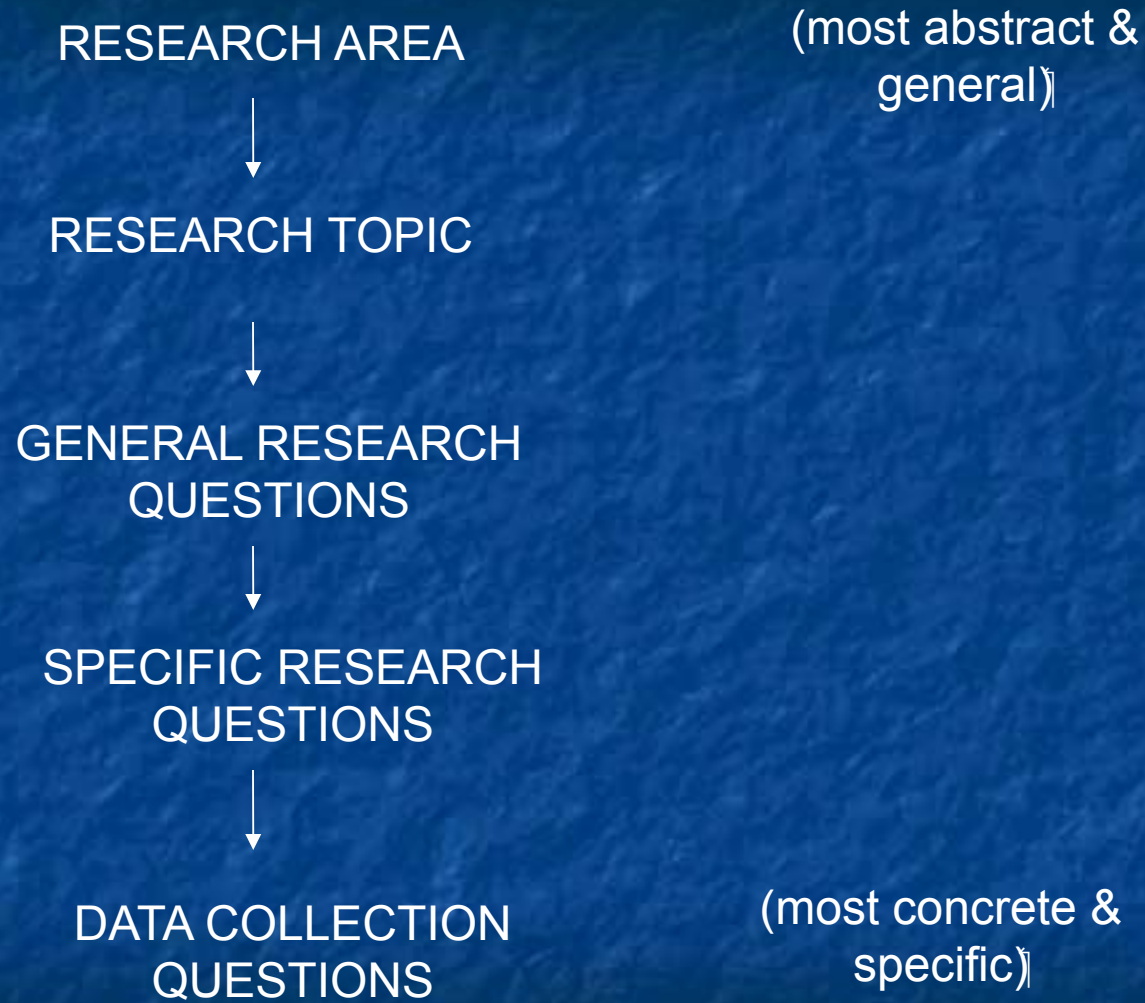
STAGES IN THE RESEARCH PROCESS



Formulating the research problem
is, in itself, a BIG problem.

Problem formulation involves

- “moving to and from different levels of abstraction and generality” (Punch 2000)
- “a progressive sharpening of concepts and a progressive narrowing of scope” (Selltiz 1976)



The research TOPIC must be grounded on some already known fact which is used to introduce the topic and from which the research problem comes from.

Topics may arise from:

1. A concern with some social problem
2. An interest in some general theme or pattern of behavior
3. Some body of theory
4. Some personal inclination or interest

(Selltiz 1976)

Sources to use in selecting a topic:

1. Printed sources
2. On-going research projects
3. Available data sets

Intensify your knowledge & familiarize yourself about what is known on your topic

1. Consult the library
2. Read written records/documents
3. Talk to “informed others”

**Topic
Problem**

(more general)



(more specific)

Moving from topic to problem involves:

1. Specifying the purpose of the research:
 - a. Exploration
 - b. Description
 - c. Explanation

Moving from topic to problem involves:

1. Narrowing down the scope of the topic and identifying the geographic and temporal scope of the problem

Moving from topic to problem involves:

1. Operationalizing the concepts to be used such that they are directly observable:

Concept (+ its dimensions)



Variables



Indicators

Concepts are embedded in research questions, but they are typically too general and abstract.

Formulate the problem by specifying the indicators of the concepts. Variables/indicators provide the link between concepts and data.

Example of Conceptualization

Millennium Development Goals

- Aims to end extreme poverty by 2015
- It has 8 goals, 18 targets & 48 indicators

Research Question: How has the Philippines progressed in terms of achieving the MDG?

Poverty (MDG)

Dimensions	Some Indicators
Income	Proportion of pop below \$1 a day
Hunger	Proportion of pop below min dietary energy consumption
Education	Net enrolment ratio in elementary
Gender equality	Ratio of literate women to men 15-24
Child mortality	Infant mortality rate
Access to water	Proportion of pop w/ sustainable access to an improved water source
Access to sanitation	Proportion of pop with access to improved sanitation

“Development expands human freedoms & capacities.”

Two concepts are used in this proposition:

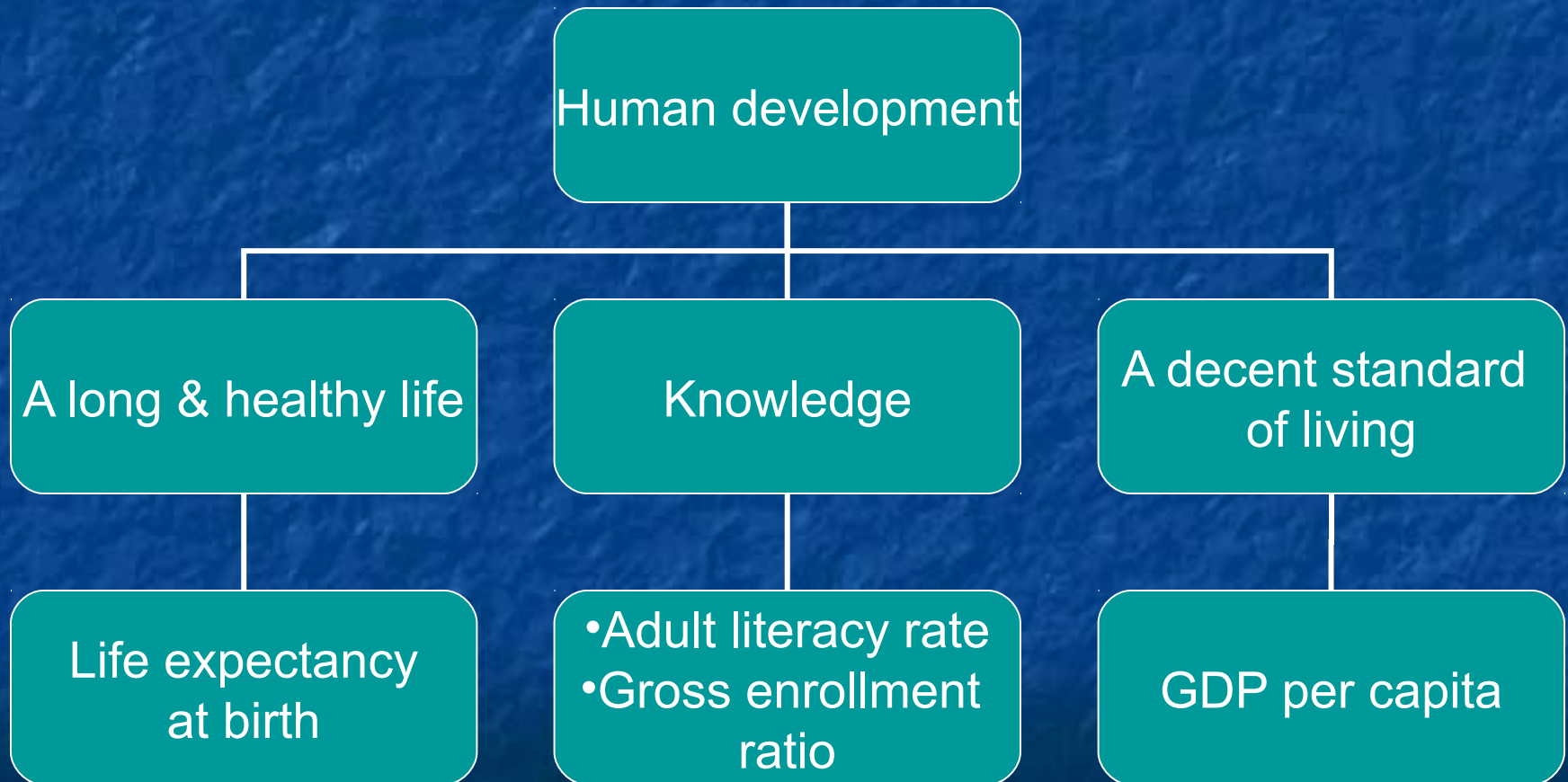
1. Development
2. Human freedom & capacities

Let us look at one way of conceptualizing these concepts.

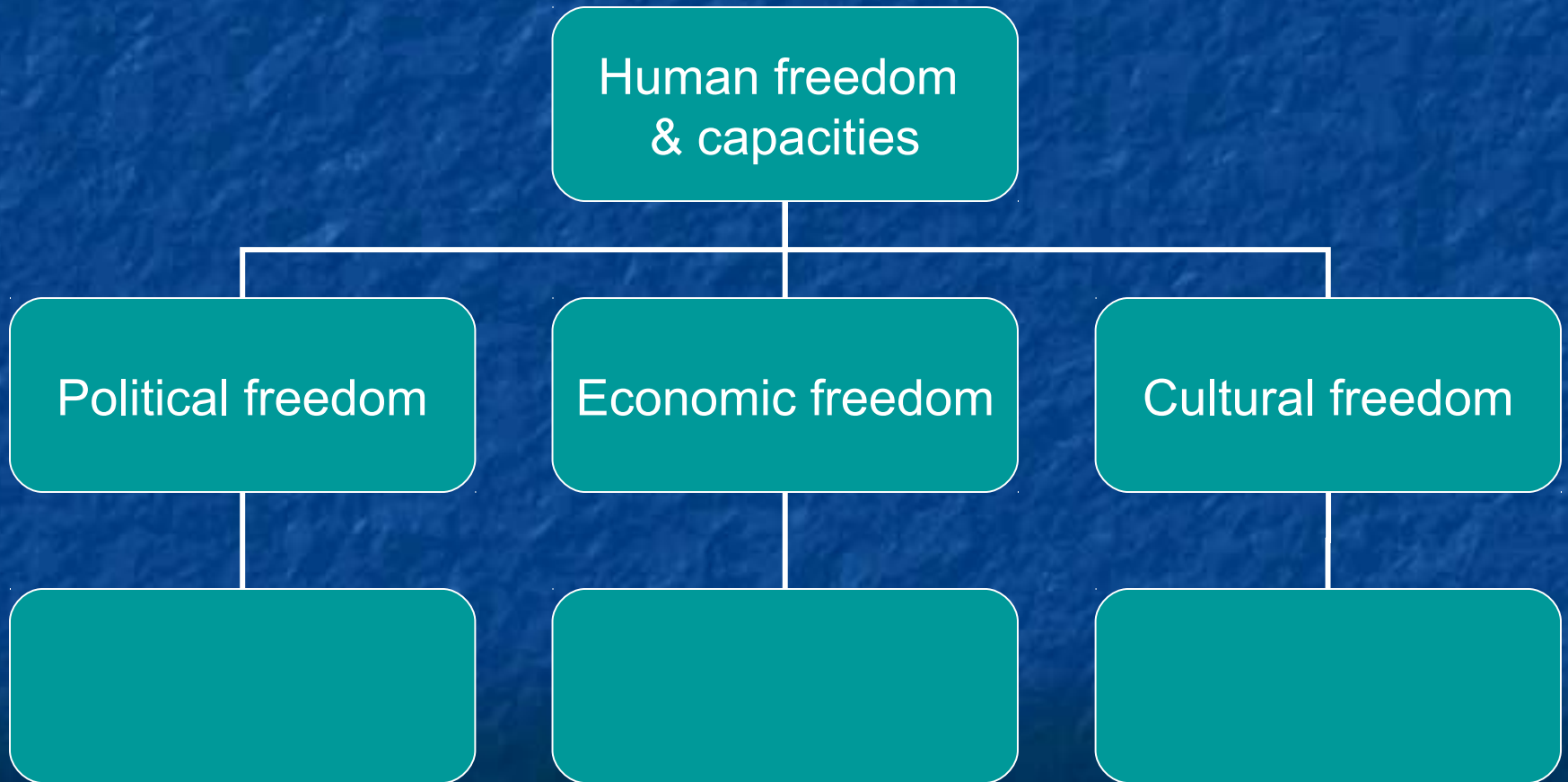
Human development

- Capacity to be and capacity to do to live a full and creative live

“Development expands human freedoms & capacities.”



“Development expands human freedoms & capacities.”

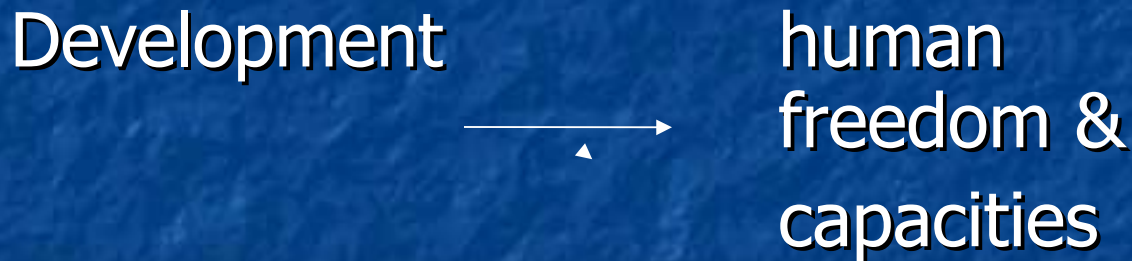


Some concepts in IP research

- Indigenous
- Cultural identity
- Ethnicity
- Ways of life
- Land rights

By translating concepts into variables and indicators, you will come up with a problem statement that:

- a. Points to identifiable variables and relationships—it expresses or asks a question about the relationship between 2 or more variables



- Suggests observations that offer answers to the problem— the variables should be observable or at least potentially observable. Well-developed and well-stated questions indicate what data will be necessary to answer it.
- Clearly identifies the research's unit of analysis, or the entities about whom or which the researcher gathers information

Moving from topic to problem involves:

- Optional: Formulating the hypotheses to be tested. Hypotheses are tentative answers to research questions. They are ***expected*** but ***unconfirmed*** relationships between 2 or more variables.

Hypotheses are stated in such a way that they are amenable to testing.

- Avoid normative statements (e.g., We should all go to church every Sunday.)
- Hypothesis must speculate on the form/direction of the relationship
 - “Happiness and income are related” is not testable
 - “The higher a person’s income, the happier he is” is testable

Hypotheses are stated in such a way that they are amenable to testing.

- Hypotheses can only have probabilistic, not exact, confirmation. Use phrases like “in general”, “more likely to”, “tends to”, etc.
- Avoid double-barreled hypotheses (e.g., the higher the population density in a city, the higher the rates of illiteracy and drug addiction)
- It should be consistent with most known facts.

To sum up, the problem statement should explicitly state

What relationship between what variables about what units of analysis do I want to study?

In making your final choice, consider your topic's

1. Feasibility
2. Relevance
3. Ethical issues

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