Writing a winning grant proposal

AGENDA

Hard facts

Is this the right fit?

Title

Background

Aims and objectives

Methods

Theoretical framework

Ethical considerations

General writing tips

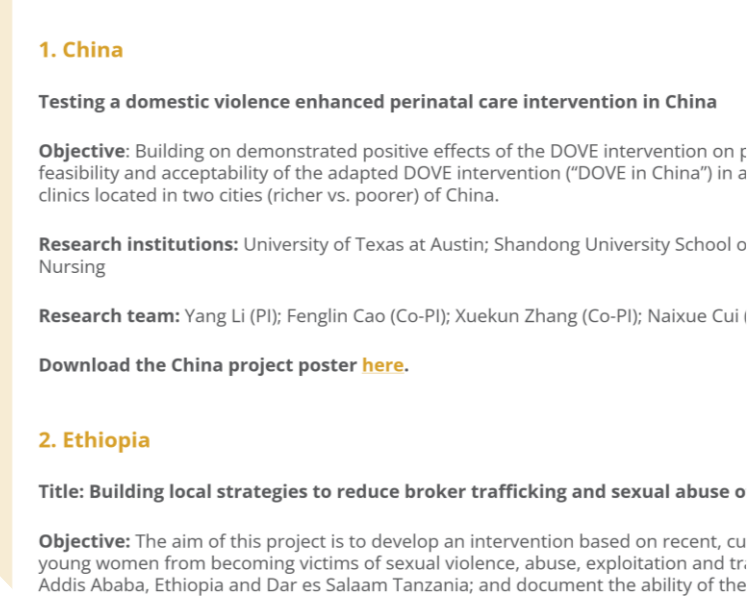
The hard facts

- Both small and large grants get rejected
- Every rejection hurts, because every grant application is a massive amount of work
- Every grant application needs to be as perfect as it can be
- “The only real deadlines are grant deadlines“

Being a renowned scientist doesn’t ensure success. On the same day that molecular biologist Carol Greider won a Nobel prize in 2009, she learnt that her recently submitted grant proposal had been rejected

How to choose the right Grant topic

- Look at what kind of projects were funded by this funder before – in this case: SVRI
- Try to find someone who has already been funded under this grant call by SVRI to get an idea about what work SVRI is interested in, what the gaps are and potentially get in touch with existing grantholders
- Try and look at successful grant applications



1. China

Testing a domestic violence enhanced perinatal care intervention in China

Objective: Building on demonstrated positive effects of the DOVE intervention on p
feasibility and acceptability of the adapted DOVE intervention ("DOVE in China") in a
clinics located in two cities (richer vs. poorer) of China.

Research institutions: University of Texas at Austin; Shandong University School o
Nursing

Research team: Yang Li (PI); Fenglin Cao (Co-PI); Xuekun Zhang (Co-PI); Naixue Cui

Download the China project poster here.

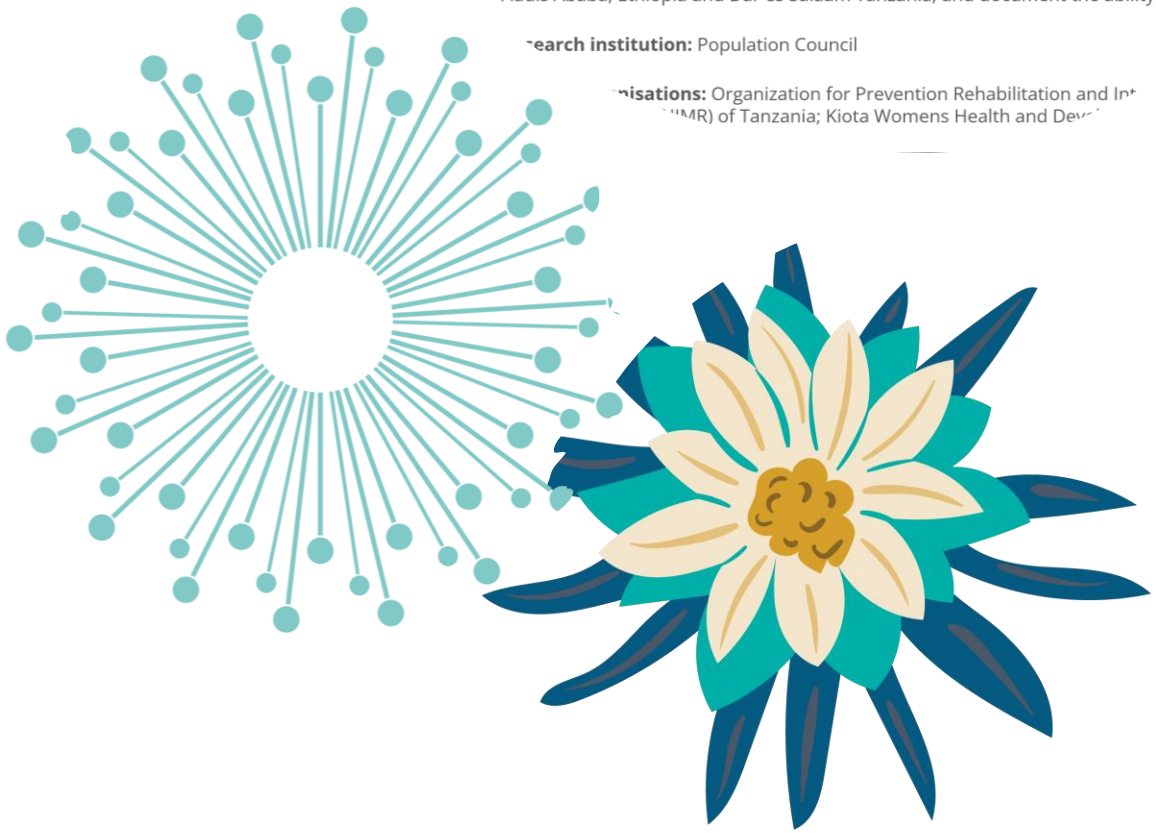
2. Ethiopia

Title: Building local strategies to reduce broker trafficking and sexual abuse o

Objective: The aim of this project is to develop an intervention based on recent, cu
young women from becoming victims of sexual violence, abuse, exploitation and tr
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and Dar es Salaam Tanzania; and document the ability of the

earch institution: Population Council

nisations: Organization for Prevention Rehabilitation and In
MR) of Tanzania; Kiota Womens Health and De



https://www.svri.org/what-we-do/research-support/svri-research-grant-2022

Pay close attention to the call

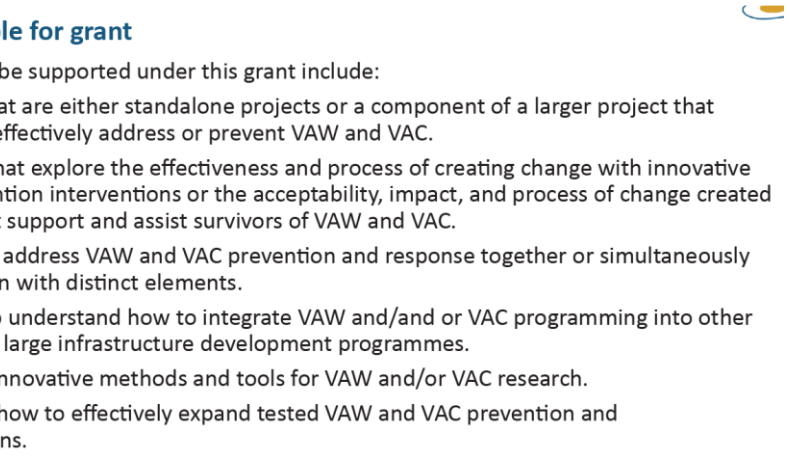
1) Eligibility

(from SVRI) Other eligibility considerations to note:

- Organisations or consortiums can submit up to two proposals, but only one will be funded
- Previous grantees will not be considered principal applicants
- Institutions who have an active SVRI grant may not apply

2) Suitability of the SVRI Grant and the specific grant call to one's own profile and research idea

- What are they looking for and is your idea matching this?



Types of projects eligible for grant

Types of projects that may be supported under this grant include:

- Research projects that are either standalone projects or a component of a larger project that will guide efforts to effectively address or prevent VAW and VAC.
- Qualitative studies that explore the effectiveness and process of creating change with innovative VAW and VAC prevention interventions or the acceptability, impact, and process of change created by interventions that support and assist survivors of VAW and VAC.
- Projects that seek to address VAW and VAC prevention and response together or simultaneously or in one intervention with distinct elements.
- Projects that work to understand how to integrate VAW and/and or VAC programming into other sectoral work and or large infrastructure development programmes.
- Those that develop innovative methods and tools for VAW and/or VAC research.
- Those that evaluate how to effectively expand tested VAW and VAC prevention and response interventions.

https://www.svri.org/documents/svri-research-grant

How to approach writing a grant application

Take your time – writing a proposal takes time

Take into account time for proof-reading, showing your application to others and revisions

Do not leave submission to the last minute, e.g. technological failures, wrong version…

The process might not end with the submission, there might be clarifications, adjustments, …

Get advice from others

- Before starting, think about an idea, discuss it with others – colleagues, family members, friends, etc. – until it becomes clear and attractive
- Discuss approaches on how to address your idea and put it into an application early
- Show an early draft to others
- Multiple rounds of proof reading of the final draft
- Get senior people to read and comment on your application
- Often more painful if people review it who you know than the anonymous panel!

The Title

- Should clearly describe what the study is about
- Concise, convincing
- Accurate, unambiguous, complete
- Relatively short and catchy, specific
- Appealing: spark interest in readers so they want to learn more
- Use professional language (avoid rarely-used abbreviations)
- There might be requirements on the title length

What matters: Background

- What is the current state of the field
- Present the knowledge gaps
- Include relevant preliminary data if available
- End with what your study will do

Current state of the field

Background: Intimate partner violence (IPV) has been recognized as a serious human rights and public health issue. It has become an essential question for development as one of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Target 5.2) and its detrimental health effect have made it a policy priority for many international and national organisations seeking to improve the lives of women and children [1-4]. Worldwide, it is estimated that at least one in three women have experienced physical and/or sexual IPV in their lifetime, with especially high rates being found in the African Region [5, 6]. It remains unknown whether women who report physical and/or sexual partner violence in the last year are experiencing partner violence continuously throughout their relationships or if its frequency, intensity and type changes over time.

- Establish the significance of your topic
- Provide background facts/information
- Define key terminology
- Show that you are aware of the existing studies in your field

Present the knowledge gaps

Despite a surge in cross-sectional studies on IPV, theoretical development has stalled since the late nineties due to the lack of longitudinal research available to test various hypotheses. Notable systematic reviews on the association of IPV with alcohol abuse, mental health and women's economic empowerment all call for longitudinal studies measured at multiple time points to clearly elucidate causal mechanisms and temporality [19, 24, 25]. Furthermore, the vast majority of existing studies draws their data on risk and protective factors of perpetration from women's own reports, rather than asking partners directly. Theories on IPV have chiefly emerged and been tested in high income countries and their transferability to other settings remains unknown. The existing gaps in evidence have direct implications for the design of interventions to address IPV and policy formation.

- Review what is known about the issue
- Explain what information is missing about the topic
- Avoid extensive crutique of previous studies

What will this study do

This study seeks to close these gaps by conducting a longitudinal study on IPV among women and men in Tanzania. The proposed study will take advantage of the research team's extensive experience in IPV research, and will build upon an existing research infrastructure previously established to conduct a

- Lay out your research question/study hypothesis
- Briefly state how youur data will fill the gap(s) idenitified before

The SVRI Grant

- Background section
  - lay out the existing knowledge
  - state key relevant studies in the field
  - state key studies in the country the study will take place in
  - Use suitable references of key studies in the field and literature from the country the study is focused on → no need to over-reference!

- Statement of need section
  - highlight the gaps in knowledge
  - state which gaps in knowledge you will address
  - stay focused on what <u>your</u> study can achieve and what gaps it can address, not mention everything possible

Read the guidance!

What matters: aims & objectives

→ Have a clear research question (study aim)

- This should not be too long and should be focused on the key theme(s)
- It does not need to include the objectives under it – these can be stated separately.

Research aims and objectives: The primary aim of this five year programme of research will be to investigate the predictors and consequences of IPV in Tanzania over time, focusing specifically on the links between IPV and women's economic empowerment, men's and women's alcohol abuse, and poor mental health. The specific objectives of the proposed qualitative and quantitative longitudinal studies

What matters: aims & objectives

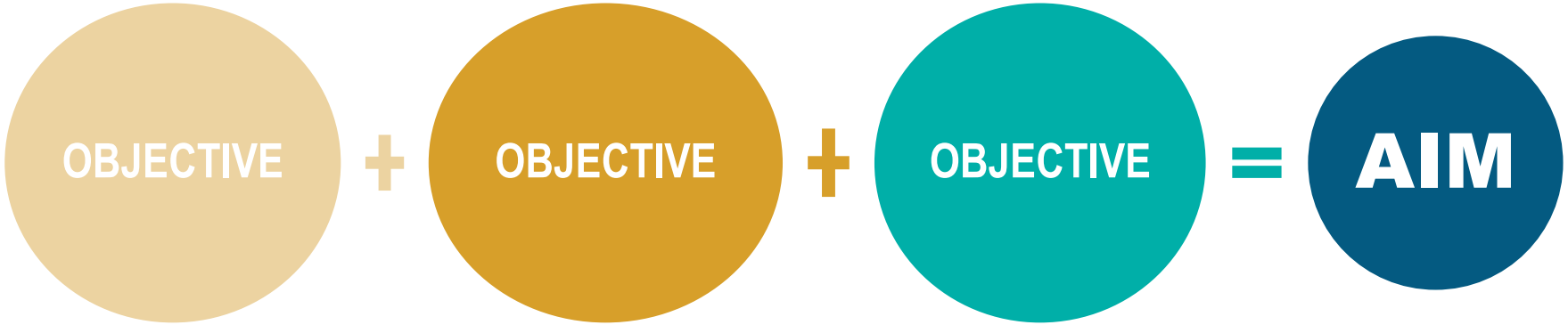
→ Have well-defined objectives: Create specific aims and well-defined criteria to quantify success, and keep it concise

→ If many, numbering helps clarity

mental health. The specific objectives of the proposed qualitative and quantitative longitudinal studies are to: 1) Map the changes in the incidence and intensity of physical and sexual IPV over time and to explore overlaps with and changes in emotional and economic abuse and controlling behaviour; 2) Investigate how changes in the incidence and intensity of IPV impact alcohol abuse, poor mental health and indicators of women's empowerment over time, with a special focus on the interactions between IPV and stressors and benefits of participation in microfinance loan groups; 3) Explore the effect of

→ If suitable, include hypotheses – yet make sure they are not just a duplication of the objectives

If you complete your objectives, you should achieve your study aim



What matters: Methods

- Most important after the aims and objectives
- They need to be easy to understand, detailed enough to be convincing
- No shortcuts here!
- Justify why the outlined method(s) are the right ones

Key components of a methods section

- Study design
- Study setting
- Study population and sampling
- Measurements
- Analysis
- Ethical considerations

Study setting

- Location and geography
- Population profile
- Size
- Socio-economic factors
- Other relevant information
- Justification (why this setting?)
- More detail if unfamiliar setting

Study population and sampling

Inclusion / Exclusion criteria

Sampling design (simple random, systematic, non-probability scheme, ...)

Time frame

Date of planned fieldwork

Procedures for initial participant contact (existence of sampling frame)

Measurements / Methodology

What tools will you use to obtain the information?
(Does it depend on what kind of information?)

Experiments (e.g. Randomized Controlled Trials)

Questionnaires

Focus Group Discussions, Key Informant Interviews

Observation of environment

Census data

Review of records – extraction of data

Laboratory testing

Variables
(if quantitative)

What will your variables be?

- Outcome (dependent) variables / endpoints

  → Describe in greater detail – particularly if there are more complicated and/or composite variables

- Predictor (independent) variables / covariates

  → Demographic characteristics are very important – summarize if possible

Data analysis & statistical methods

Data will be entered where, in what program for analysis

Special tools/issues in data analysis

Stratification

Sub-group analysis

Analysis of potential biases (Included vs excluded studies, Lost to follow-up vs. Retained participants, ...)

Collapsing of variables, transformation

Statistical significance

Ethical considerations

State by which Institutional Review Board (**IRB**) ethics approval will be sought or whether there is an exception

Vulnerable populations – may require more explanation of procedures to ensure lack of coercion

Describe ethical issues that will arise from any involvement of people and detail how you will deal with those issues

Describe what structures you will put in place to ensure strong ethical adherence, safety and well-being of participants and staff

Common mistakes

1) Too much detail

- Copy pasted from protocol or another paper
- Usually irritating and a waste of space

2) Not enough detail

- Leaving out essential information
- Leaving out key details of methods

What matters: impact

- Consider the impact of your work
- MRC: „Who could benefit in the long term? How can you increase the chances of reaching those beneficiaries? Even if your proposal doesn't directly address the immediate needs of the women, girls and children you should be able to explain *the pathway that links your work to reduce violence against women and children*."
- What are your outputs?
- How will you disseminate your work beyond peer-reviewed publications?
- Who will benefit?

Theoretical Framework

They provide researchers with:

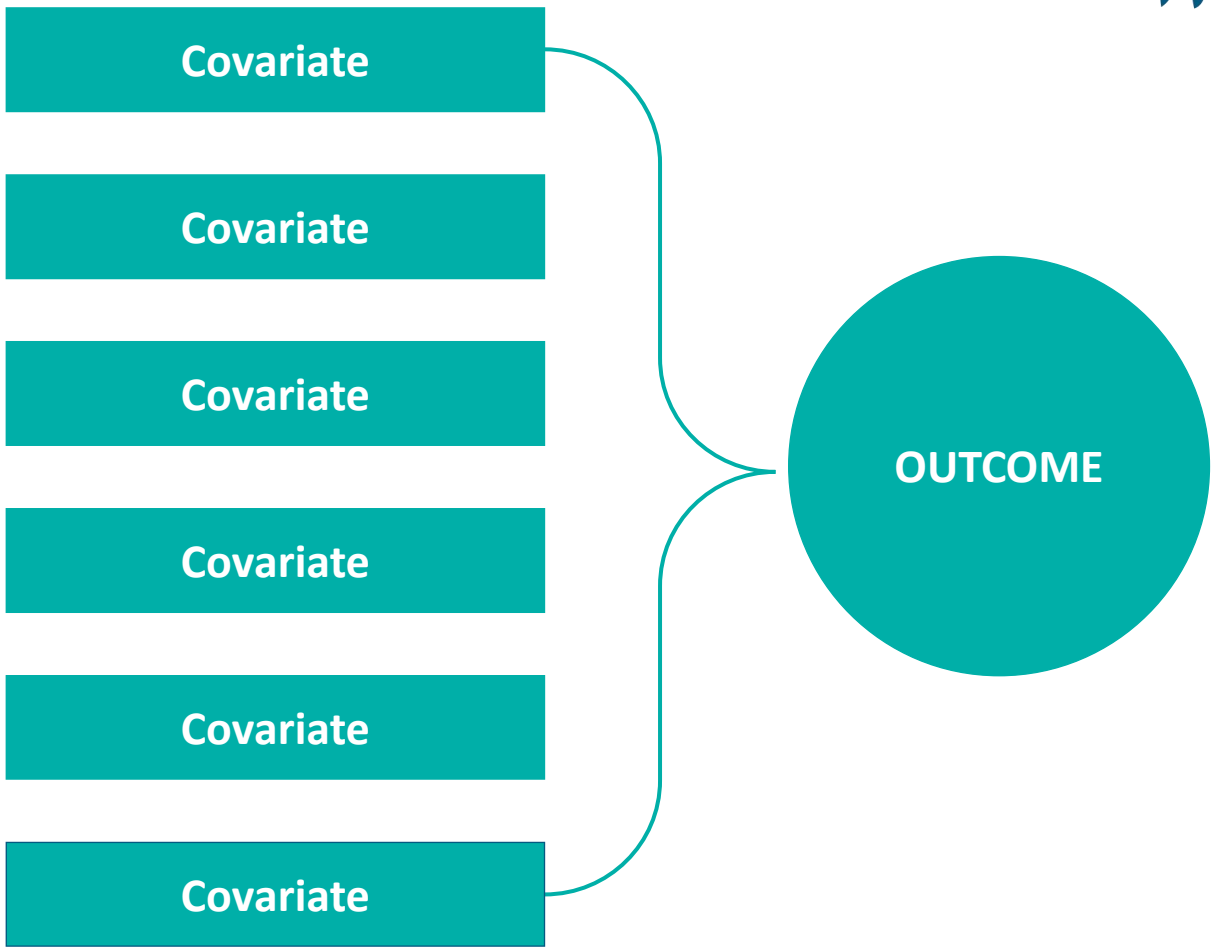
- Ability to **move beyond descriptions** of ‘what’ **to explanations** of ‘why’ and ‘how’’
- Means of setting out an **explanation set** that might be used to define and make sense of the data that flow from the aim/research question
- A **filtering tool** for selecting appropriate research questions and related data collection methods and sets the **boundaries** of the work
- A **reference point/structure** for the discussion of the literature, methodology and results

Descriptive, explanatory models

What are components or aspects of the subject of interest?

For example:

"What are the health risks and consequences associated with trafficking?"

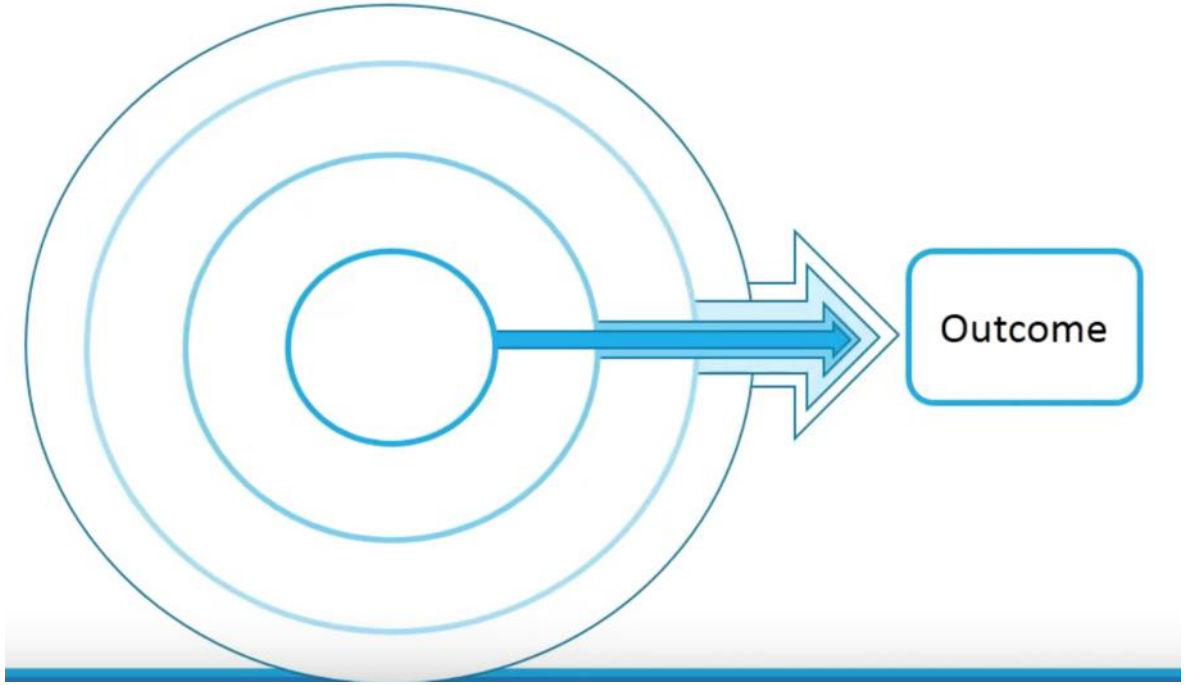


Dana R Thomson: Templates to develop your conceptual framework: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8RWYkbi9b4

Ecological or social determinants

How do variables relate to the outcome of interest?

What risk and protective factors exist for intimate partner violence?



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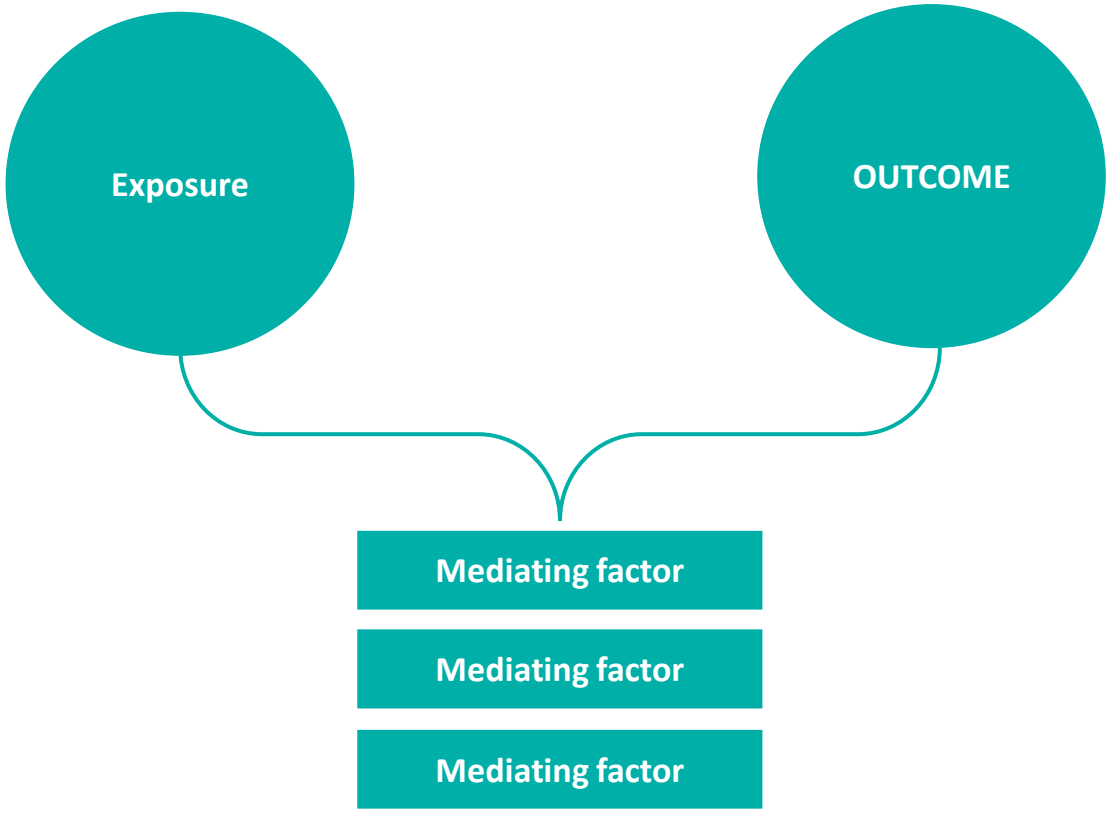
Causal, hypothesis test

What contributes to the effect of interest?

For example:

"Why does alcohol use lead to higher levels of intimate partner violence"



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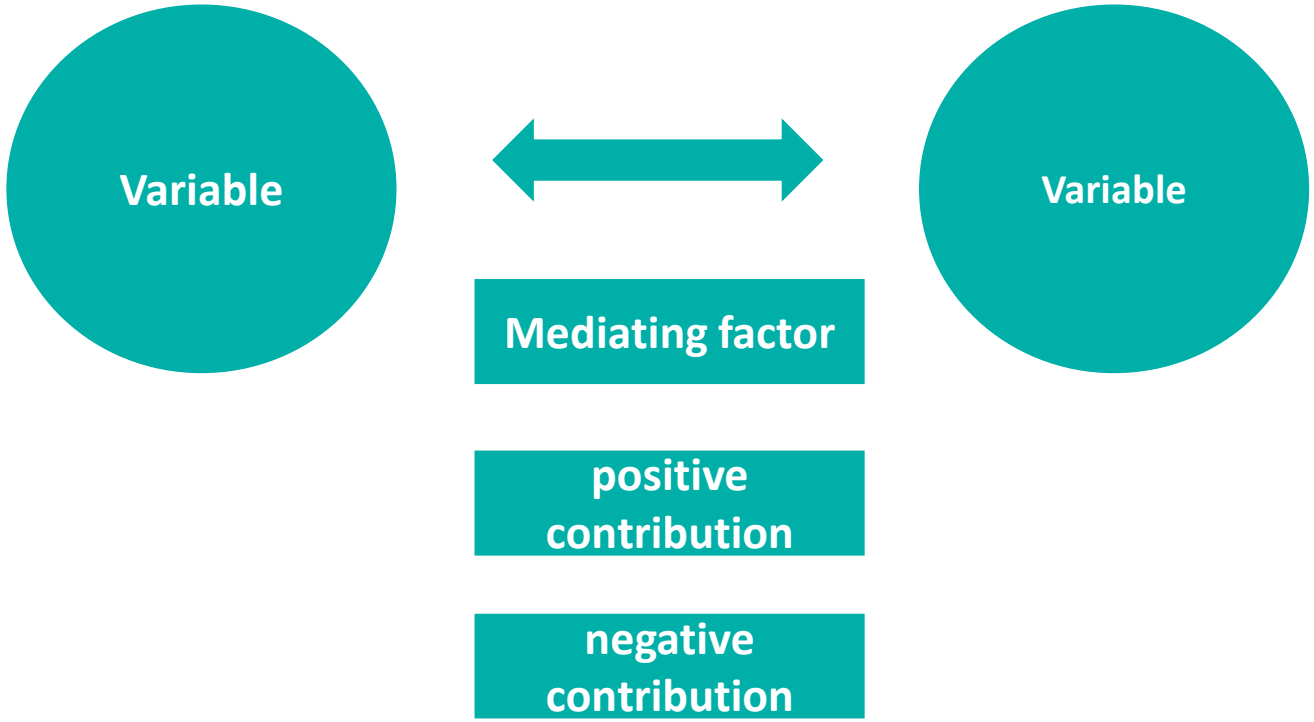
Relational, analytical

How do certain variables relate to others?



For example:

“What is the relationship between intimate partner violence and violence against children in the same household?”

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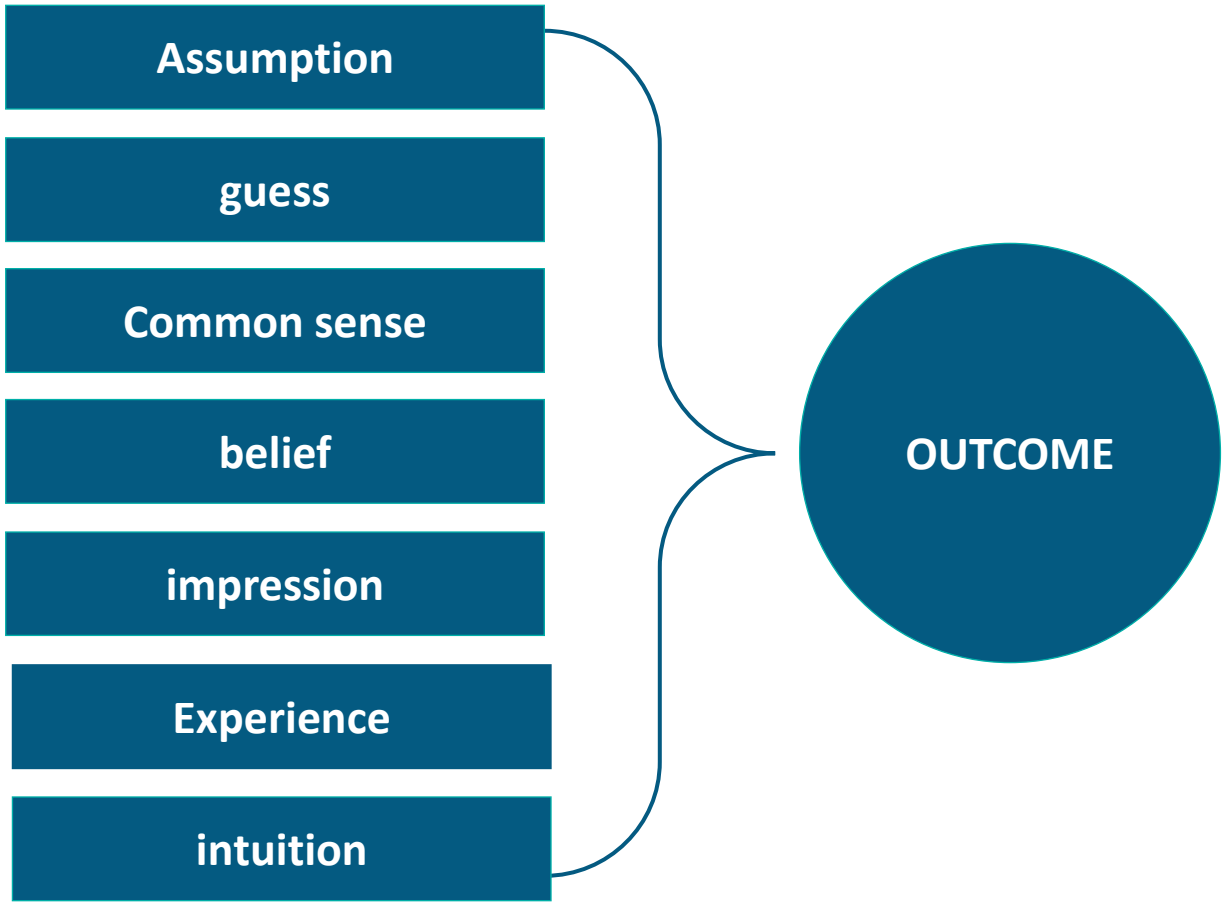
First version: base on your own assumptions about your research aim and objectives (or research questions)



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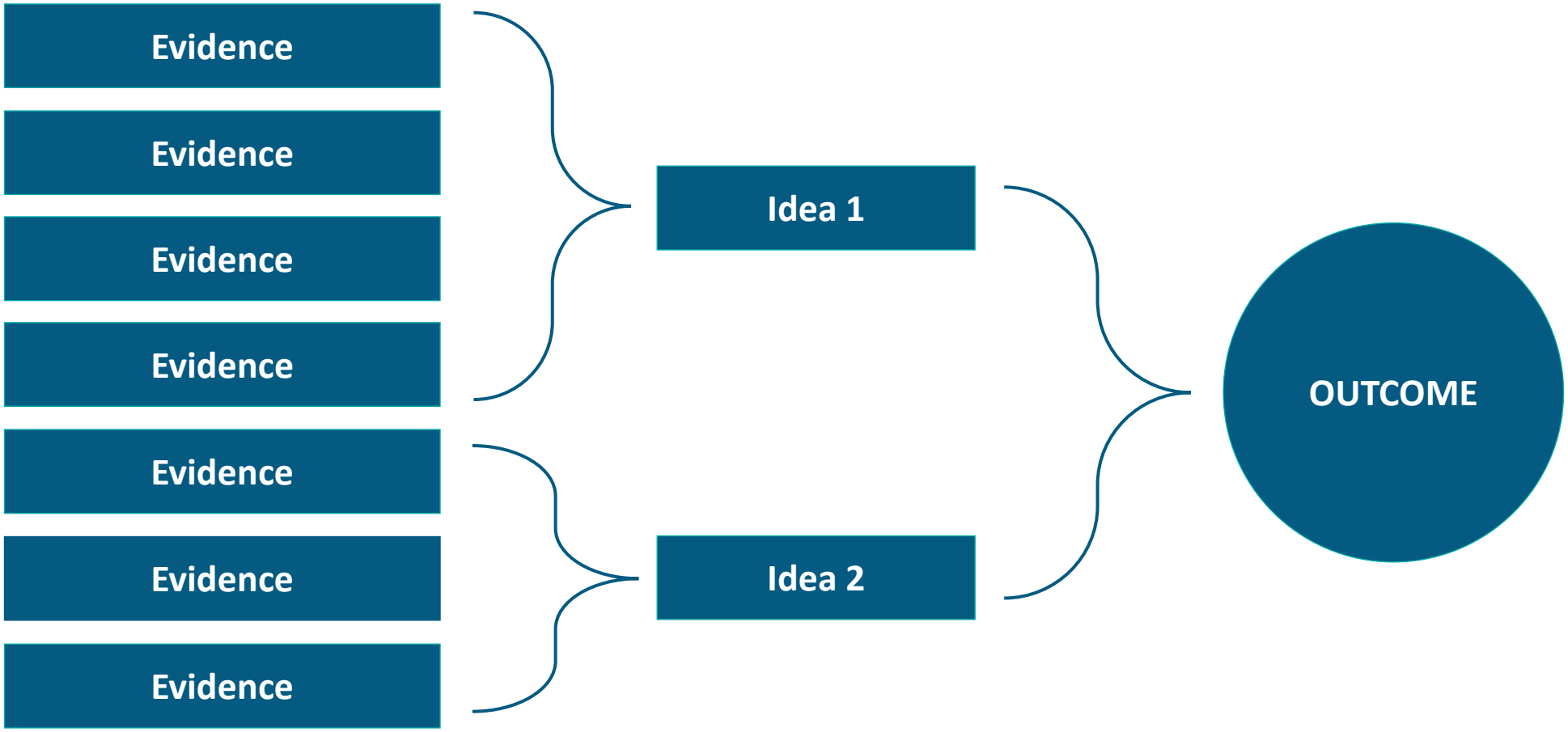
Update based on literature review (systematic)



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Writing style

- Reviewers score 10-30 applications. How can you make life easy for them?
- Short precise, not complicated language
- Be clear
- Formatting – white space, paragraphs, bold headings, illustrations
- No spelling errors, grammatical slips and lengthy proposals

Get the right partners

- They need to fit your proposal
- You od not necessarily need a big name of a person or institution
- You need to trust them
- You need to be able to actually do the work with them
- Are you capable of delivering? Often a team is judged on being realistic

Top tips

- We can't review proposals we don't get
- Ensure that there is consistency across aim, objective and methods
- Realistic budget and good explanation of it
- Get the formatting right – it all needs to look nice and tidy as it shows you care
- Allow plenty of time
- Tell a compelling story
- Do not pack too much into it
- More speculative and self-promotional than papers
- Show that your ideas are worthy and exciting!

We look forward to receiving your proposals

USEFUL LINKs AND E-MAIL ADDRESSES

The SVRI Research Grant Guidelines and FAQ in three languages:
The SVRI Research Grant | Sexual Violence Research Initiative

SVRI email address: svri@svri.org

ProposalCENTRAL online system:
https://proposalcentral.com/

ProposalCENTRAL email address: pcsupport@altum.com

World Bank country classification by income: World Bank Country and Lending Groups – World Bank Data Help Desk