

Community Nursing Project

“Steve” wanted to combine an experimental design with “Action Research” to assess the effectiveness of a community nursing project. Having already completed his literature review, he sent it to us so we could get familiar with his topic: preventing children from falling out windows.

Does this seem like a strange topic? Five thousand children are injured each year as the result of window falls, and many of those injuries are fatal. Most of these children were younger than five years old. Steve’s goal was to spread awareness through cooperation with community organizations such as churches and businesses.

When Steve first contacted us, he said he needed us to come up with a methods chapter based on his literature review. However, he suddenly had a revelation about how to make the best possible use of our service:

“I don’t want the complexity of the dissertation process to stop me from doing something meaningful. I’ll tell you what I want to do, and you tell me how we can make it work as a strong original research project.”

Steve’s idea was to spread awareness among parents in a particular urban community and encourage them to take specific action: install window guards. He emphasized to parents that screens do not offer any protection. Window guards must be used if young children live in the house. He wanted to use this intervention in a low-income inner city neighborhood with characteristics that make it statistically more likely setting for falls to occur. We advised him to choose a neighborhood with a large number of children under the age of five, because other recent research shows that age group to be the most likely fall victims.

We wrote a methods chapter and emailed it to him. In the email, we told him he had theoretical backing in Protection Motivation Theory, an approach to behavior change based on cognitive activity associated with the perception of a threat. Steve replied and said:

“I have an enormous feeling of gratitude right now. This is such a relief and such a benefit to me. I can’t believe how impressive this study has become.”

The research was designed to assess the effectiveness of Steve’s awareness/safety campaign. We wanted to know to what extent a community-based awareness program could influence people to take specific measures related to fall prevention. This type of research is sometimes called “Action Research” because the researcher is taking action to improve outcomes in a specific setting. In such cases, it is similar to a case study design. It can also be described as experimental, because we were testing whether the intervention (The awareness campaign we created for Steve) was effective in motivating parents to install window guards.

Without giving away too many details of Steve’s project, we’ll mention the points he invited us to share. Steve wanted to complete an Action Research project that would “save at least one

child's life," and he told us that after speaking with so many people and distributing educational materials he believes that goal has been achieved. We also were able to show that his community health intervention resulted in a statistically significant change as parents took action and installed window guards to prevent falls. As a result of this measurable success, future community nurse practitioners may be able to get funding for similar projects modeled after the one we designed.