



# Act 79 Implementation: Why is There Such Variance Among Commonwealth Counties?

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Criminal Justice Advisory Board Conference

April 21, 2026



# Acknowledgement

This project is supported by PCCD Grant # 2023-BC-SS-44398, awarded by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD). The awarded funds originate with the Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed within this presentation are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of PCCD or the Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.



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# Presentation Roadmap

1. Why are We Doing This Study?
2. Theoretical Foundation
3. Study Design
4. Methods: Data Collection and Analyses
5. What's Next?



# Why are We Doing This Study?



# Act 79 of 2018 (HB 2060)

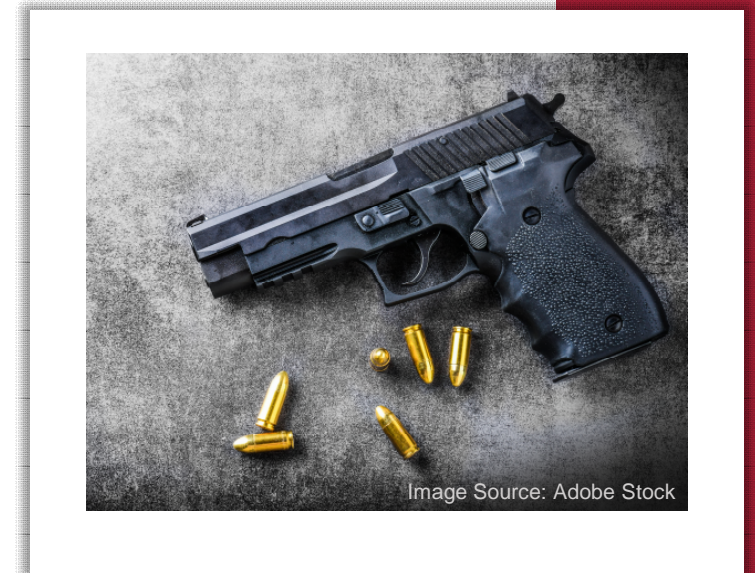
- Signed into law by Governor Tom Wolfe (enacted date: October 12, 2018)
  - Effective date: April 10, 2019
- Amended Title 18 (Crimes Code) and Title 23 (Domestic Relations Code) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statute
- One of 29 states with similar laws (RAND, 2026)

Image Source: Adobe Stock



# Changes Made by Act 79 of 2018

- Relinquishment
  - Law enforcement agency
  - Licensed federal firearms dealer
  - Commercial armory
  - Defendant's attorney
- Timeframe
  - 24 hours
- Less judicial discretion
  - Mandatory relinquishment after a final hearing
  - Discretionary in temporary orders and final orders entered pursuant to a Consent Agreement





# Protection from Abuse Orders (PFA) are “Quasi-Criminal”

- Relief
  - No contact
  - Eviction
  - Temporary child custody
  - Temporary child support
- Violation of PFA
  - Arrest and charges of Indirect Criminal Contempt
  - Up to six months in jail, fines (\$300 - \$1,000), mandatory counseling, permanent criminal record
- Violation of Firearm Relinquishment Provision
  - Misdemeanor of second degree
  - Prohibition from owning or possessing a firearm for 5 years, until final release from confinement, or until final release from supervision





# Act 79 of 2018 Qualitative Research Initiatives

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# Goal

**Evaluate current implementation of Act 79 of 2018 by local jurisdictions in PA and identify strategies to improve implementation.**



# Objectives

1. **Conduct** a comprehensive qualitative analysis of a subset of PA counties' implementation of Act 79 of 2018 to provide context for findings from a quantitative analysis, including determining local procedures for data collection and input.
2. **Assess** community-level implementation of A79 through five critical lenses: survivors, law enforcement officers, victim services representatives, Sheriff's offices and law enforcement agencies
3. **Examine** the effects of A79's weapons relinquishment requirements on survivors' perceptions of safety and efficacy within the PFA process
4. **Recommend** strategies for policy and practice changes at the state and local levels



# Selection of Study Sites

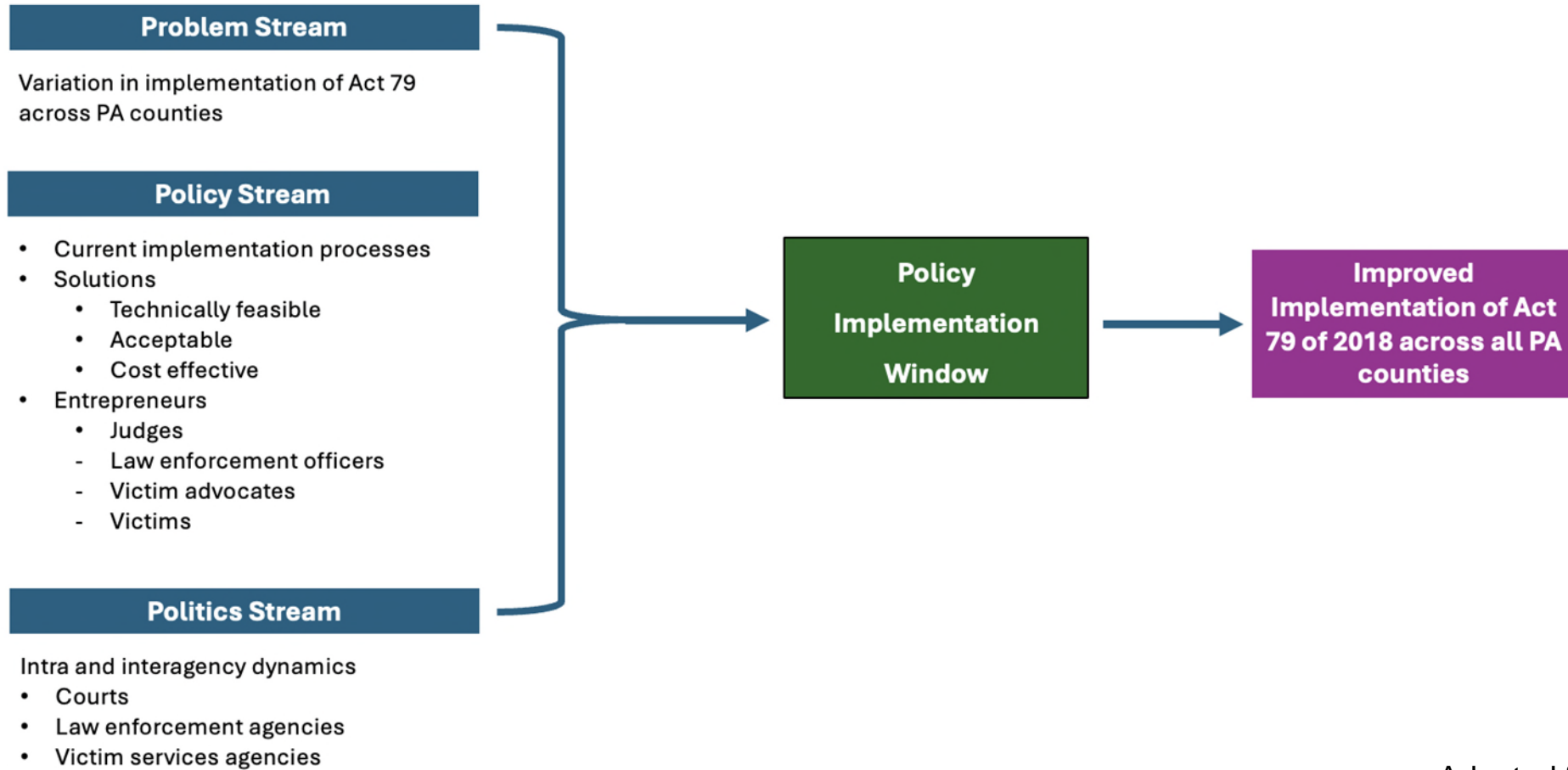
- ✓ CRPA Rural/Urban
- ✓ PFA
  - Cases
  - 2023 Final Relinquishment Order (number)
  - 2023 Final Relinquishment Retrieved (%)
- ✓ Demographics
  - Total population
  - Race and ethnicity
  - Persons in poverty
  - Bachelor's Degree or Higher, age 25+
- ✓ Voter Registration



# Theoretical Foundation



# Theoretical Foundation



Adapted from Kingdon (2011)

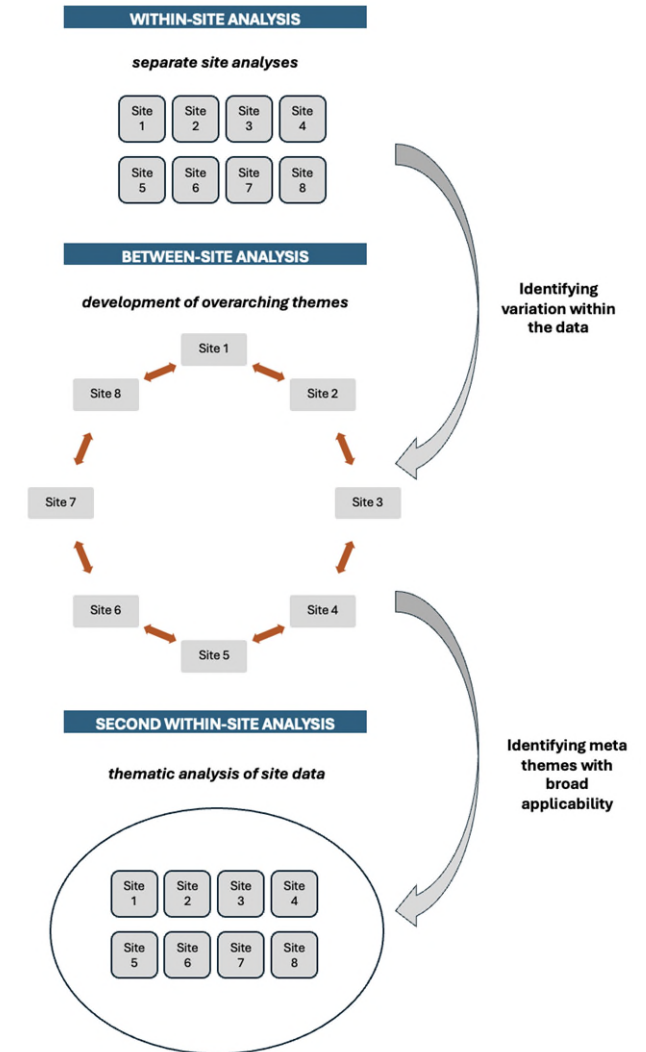


# Study Design



# MSQR

- **Within** site data collection and analyses
  - Local conditions, procedures, and practices
  - Factors that affect implementation of Act 79
  - Stakeholders' perspectives

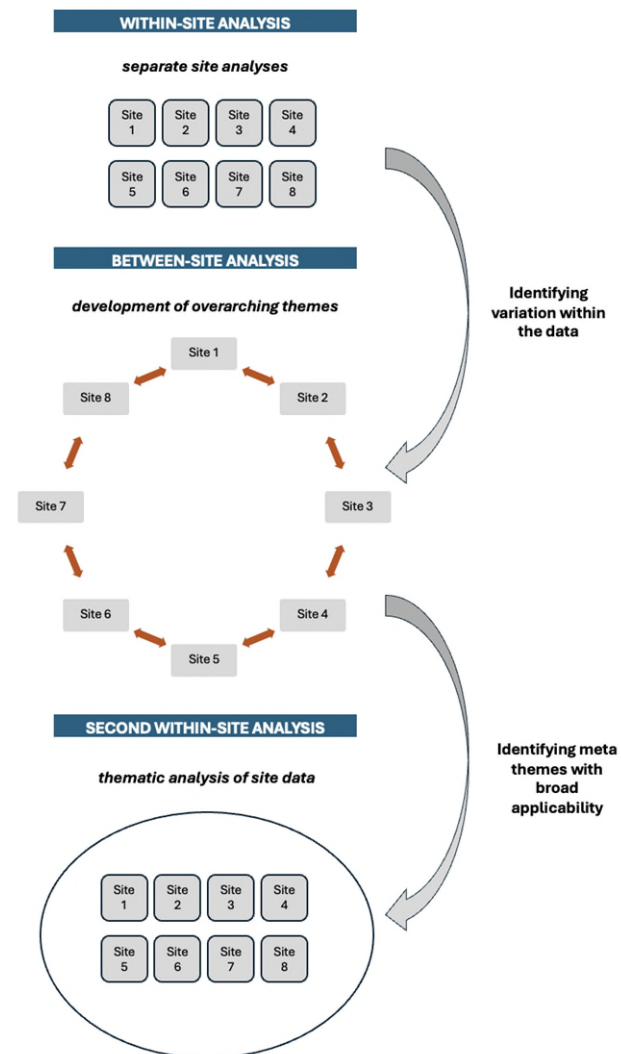


Adapted from Jenkins et al. (2011)



# MSQR

- **Between** site data analyses
  - Similarities, differences; comparisons
  - Patterns between sites
  - Meta themes (i.e., high-level themes that connect smaller themes, result in broad patterns)

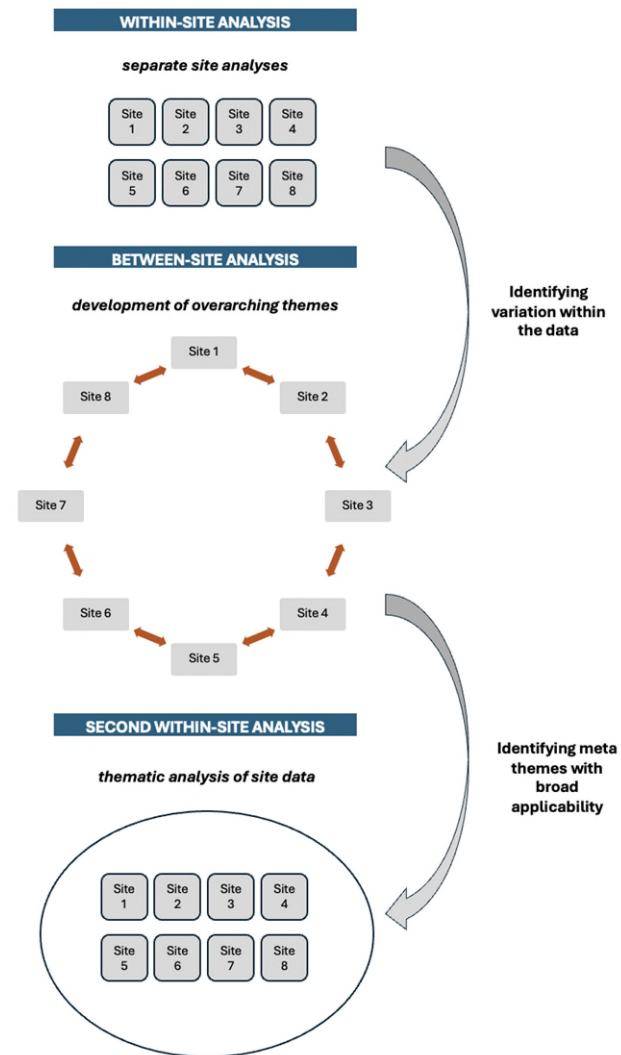


Adapted from Jenkins et al. (2011)



# MSQR

- **Second within site data analyses**
  - Meta themes accurately represent all data
  - Convergence (meet @ the same place)



Adapted from Jenkins et al. (2011)



# Why Did We Choose This Design?

- Counties are different and the MSQR accounts for this difference
  - Local context shapes implementation processes within each site *AND*
  - Meaningful conclusions can be drawn about shared experiences across sites
  - While supporting “fit” with local needs and existing resources

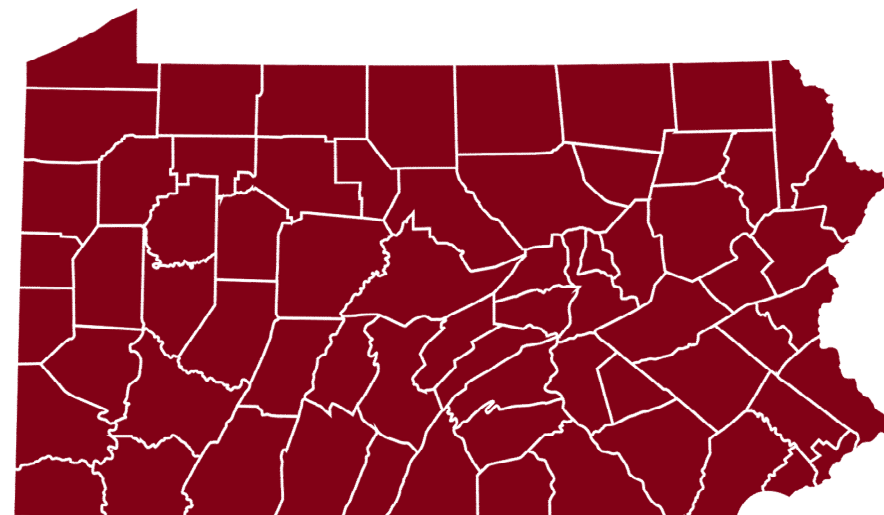


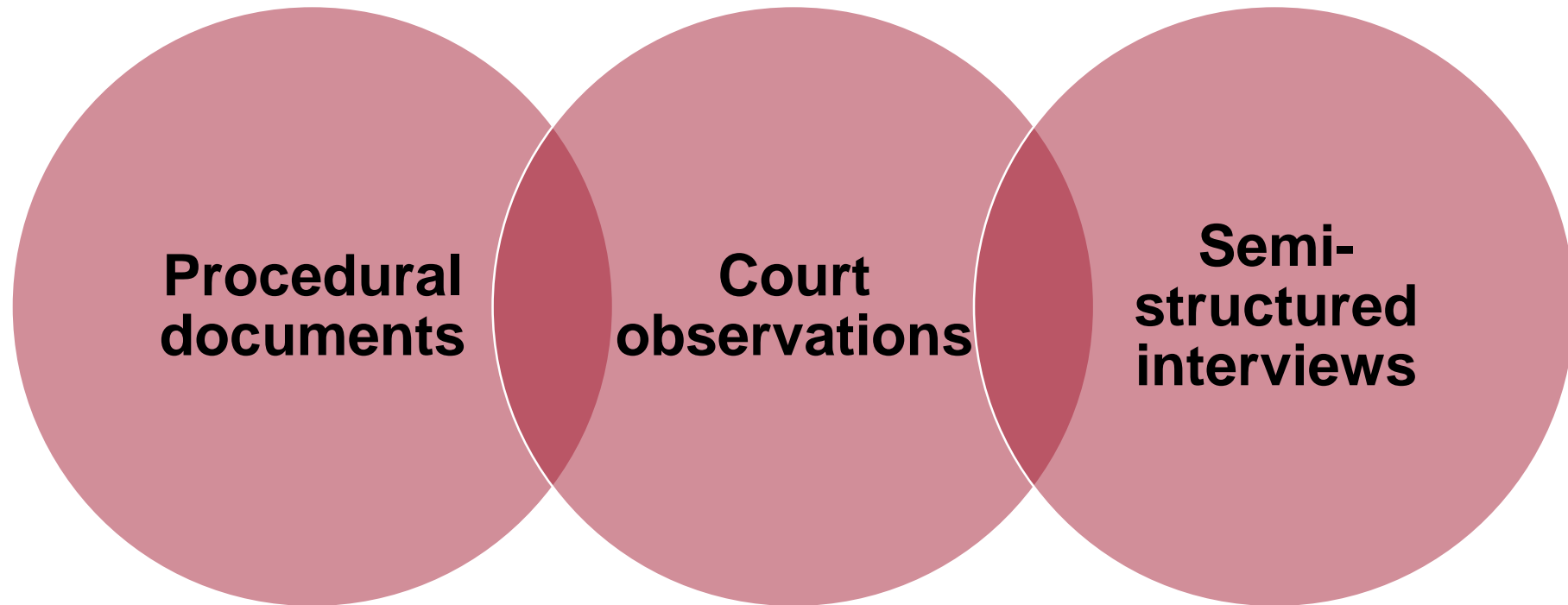
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# Methods: Data Collection and Analyses



# Data Collection





# Data Collection

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- Procedural documents (n = 105)
  - Agencies' procedures for implementing Act 79 of 2018, including processes, practices, communication and enforcement mechanisms, vulnerabilities, and similarities and differences
  - PA Bench book; law enforcement policies, victim services, court documents and proceedings, district attorney memos, PFAD training protocols; county, township, and municipal law enforcement polices



# Data Collection

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- Court observations (8 sites, 12 courtrooms)
  - Real time implementation of Act 79 of 2018 for temporary and final PFA hearings
  - Standardized protocol to examine (1) courtroom context; (2) hearing process; (3) case background; (4) weapons inquiry; (5) outcome(s); (6) fidelity to statutory requirements



Image Source: Adobe Stock

Labriola et al. (2010); Moracco et al. (2021)



# Data Collection

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- Semi-structured interviews (41, continuing)
  - Explore experiences with and perceptions of Act 79 of 2018 among stakeholders (entrepreneurs)
  - Interview guides, tailored to stakeholder group, exploring (1) experiences with and perspectives of Act 79 of 2018, (2) intra and interagency relationships, (3) communication, (4) implementation processes, (5) resources, and (6) safety
  - Zoom, 60-90 minutes, audio-recorded, transcribed



Image Source: Adobe Stock



# Data Analyses

- Qualitative content analysis (procedural documents); thematic analysis (court observations and semi-structured interviews)
  - Coding schemes and codebooks for data collected @ each site and across all sites; codes collapsed into emergent themes; themes refined – “theming of themes” – to develop meta themes applicable to all counties
  - Team-based coding; Atlas.ti

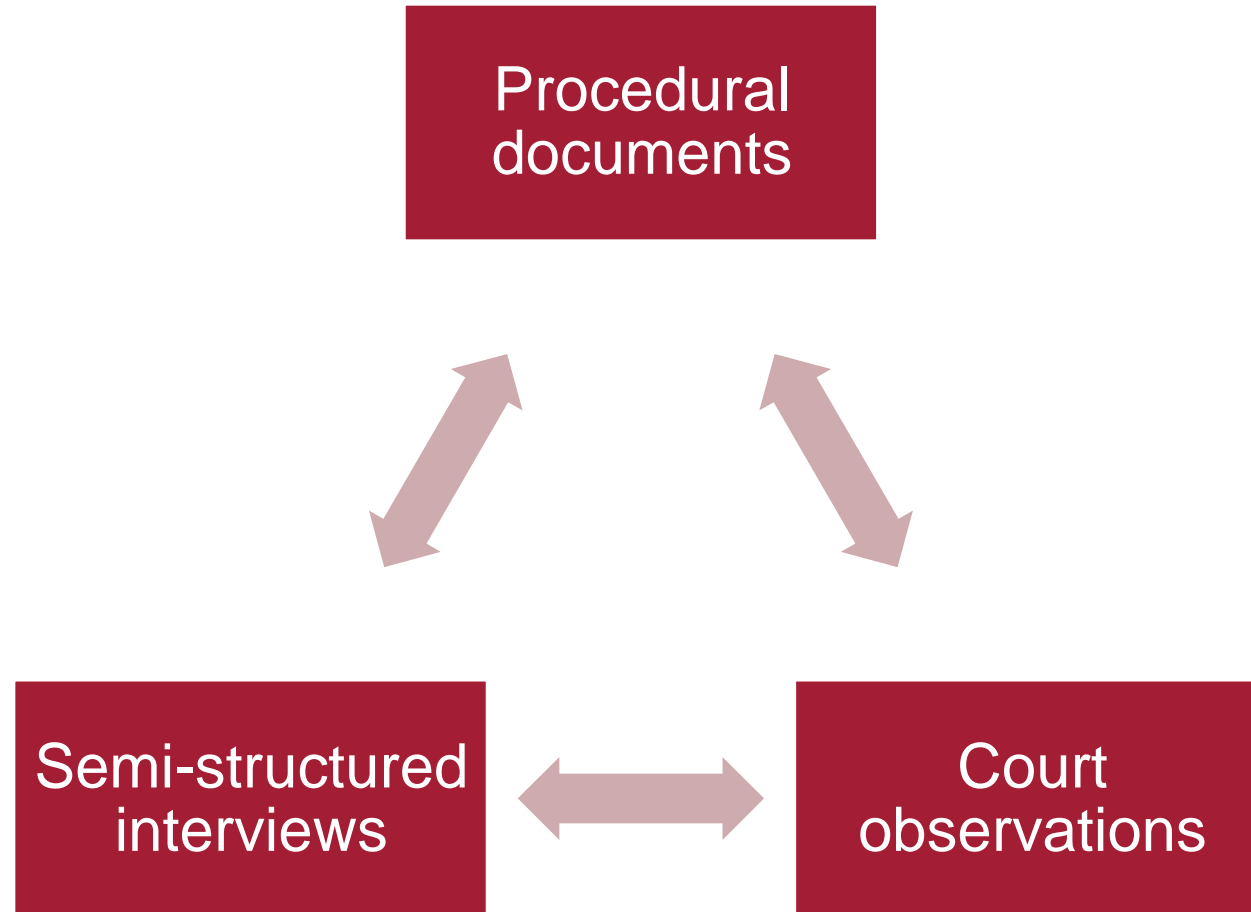


Image Source: Adobe Stock

Hseih et al. (2005); Schrier (2012); Macqueen et al. (2008)



# Triangulation



Miles & Huberman (1994)



# What's Next?



# What's Next?

- Complete court observations
- Conclude interviews
- Analyze coded data
- Make recommendations
- Disseminate findings



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# Questions?



# Thank you!

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