
BLOCK 1 SOCIAL RESEARCH AND SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH	7
BLOCK 2 APPROACHES TO SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH	39
BLOCK 3 SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH PROCESS	97
BLOCK 4 DATA PROCESSING AND TABULATOIN	155

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the course on, '**Research Methods in Social Work**'. There are four blocks in this course. **Block 1** is on '**Social Research and Social Work Research**'. This block provides a comprehensive view of the concept, meaning, scope and types of social work research. Besides identifying social work research as a method of social work, this block also explains the relation of social work research with other methods of social work. This block also highlights the various categories of research such as qualitative and quantitative, prominent research designs like descriptive, exploratory and experimental, types of data collection and data triangulation.

Block 2 is on '**Approaches to Social Work Research**'. This block will explain the different approaches and methods of social work research. It will help in clarifying the qualitative and quantitative approaches and methods of social work research. The block will describe the characteristics of qualitative research and explain in-depth interviewing, Focus Group Discussion, Case Study Method, Ethnography, Participatory Rural Appraisal etc. This block will throw light on the various methods of quantitative research viz. experimental research, survey research etc. This block will also explain mixed method research.

Block 3 deals with '**Social Work Research Process**'. In this block, you will understand the steps of research process and the relevance of each step. This block also explains the concept of research design and describe the types of research designs. The block will highlight the methods and types of sampling and the various sampling procedures. Finally, the block will also explore the methods and tools of data collection, sources of data collection, and understand the intricacies of questioning in research.

Block 4 is on '**Data Processing and Tabulation**'. This block discusses the data processing stage of research which includes editing, coding and measurements. Data interpretation, analysis and format of preparing research report have been explained in this block. The basics of statistical techniques like measures of central tendency and measures of dispersion have also been discussed in this block.

This course will give you a comprehensive understanding of research methods in social work.

Block

1

**SOCIAL RESEARCH AND SOCIAL WORK
RESEARCH**

Unit 1

Basic Tenets of Research

9

Unit 2

Social Work Research: Meaning, Scope and Uses

18

Unit 3

Types of Research

29

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the course on “**Research Methods in Social Work**”. The first block of the course is on ‘**Social Research and Social Work Research**’. It has three units which provides basic facts about social work research. Unit **one** is on ‘**Basic Tenets of Research**’. This unit will explain the basic features and characteristics of research, scientific approach and objectivity in research, relevance and need of research and social work research as a method of social work. The **second** unit is on ‘**Social Work Research: Meaning, Scope and Uses**’. This unit focuses on understanding the meaning and scope of social work research and differentiate between social work research and social research. The unit will also appraise the scope of social work research, develop understanding about the uses of social work research and gauge the relation of social work research with other methods of social work discipline. Unit **three** is on “**Types of Research**”. From this unit you will be able to get information on various categories of research such as qualitative and quantitative research approaches, describe prominent research designs like descriptive, exploratory and experimental, know about types of data collection based on sources, longitudinal and cross-sectional research. This unit will also examine triangulation of research approaches, methods and tools of data collection.

The three units of this block provide comprehensive understanding of social research and social work research which will help you understand the basic tenets of research, the meaning, scope and uses of social work research and types of research in detail.

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UNIT 1 BASIC TENETS OF RESEARCH

*Prof. Archana Kaushik

Contents

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Research: Meaning and Basic Characteristics
- 1.3 Natural and Social Science Research
- 1.4 Need of research
- 1.5 Social work research as a method of social work
- 1.6 Let us sum up
- 1.7 Key words
- 1.8 Suggested readings

1.0 OBJECTIVES

Research has become an integral part of all the disciplines and professions. In this unit you would be able understand the basic features and characteristics of research. After reading this unit, you should be able to understand the:

- Scientific approach and objectivity in research;
- Features of research;
- Relevance and need of research; and;
- Social work research as a method of social work;

1.1 INTRODUCTION

All the organisms including humans get information from their surroundings. They analyze and utilize this information for better adaptation to their environment. However, often times that information is biased. In research, effects are directed towards collection of information in such a manner that it is accurate, dependable and reliable. So, research is a scientific process of gathering authentic and reliable information about certain aspects of the world around us. It may be defined as “a systematic inquiry towards understanding a social phenomenon”. Research is a scientific approach to gain knowledge.

Research is a vital component of most of the social work interventions. It helps in finding the root cause of the problem at hand. Certain characteristics that make fact finding endeavour a research are – objectivity, verifiability, replication and prediction. Though certain basic components of natural research and social science research remain the same, the latter has more flexibility and variability than the former one. Let us understand these aspects in detail.

1.2 RESEARCH: MEANING AND BASIC CHARACTERISTICS

In our day to day living, we observe things and events around us and respond according to our perceptions or views about those stimuli (things and events). Research is also observing certain problems or issues in a specific way characterized by objectivity and without preconceived notions or biases. Research may be defined as “a structured inquiry that utilizes acceptable scientific methodology to solve problems and creates new knowledge that is generally applicable” (Grinnell, 1993). Likewise, Burns (1994) defines research as “a systematic investigation to find answers to a problem”. According to Kerlinger (1986), “scientific research is a systematic, controlled empirical and critical investigation of propositions about the presumed relationships about various phenomena”.

From the above definitions it is clear that research is a process for collecting, analyzing and interpreting information to answer to certain well-defined questions. Though there are innumerable topics or areas where research can be carried out, certain basic characteristics are common in conducting research. Let us briefly examine these characteristics of research.

Scientific: Any fact finding attempt is called a research if it is scientific. In other words, if the research process is systematic, follows a well-specified procedure and methodology of collection, classification and interpretation of data, it is called scientific.

Objectivity: A research is often beyond the subjective biases of the researcher. Objectivity is one of the prominent features of research. Strict procedures of research work are directed to eliminate personal biases of researchers.

Verifiability: Another characteristic of research is verifiability which means that data collected and interpreted can be scrutinized and tested for accuracy and genuineness. The research findings are available in the public domain for verifiability. This concept implies that whatever you conclude on the basis of your findings is correct and can be verified by you and others.

Replication: Related to verifiability is another characteristic of research called Replication. It implies that your research work can be carried out again in same or similar context and should give similar results. When a systematic procedure of data collection and interpretation is employed, findings are replicable and verifiable.

Prediction: Research findings explain certain events or phenomenon and also predict future trends. This helps in planning interventions accordingly. This characteristic of research also depicts its utility. Predictions also lead to theory-formation.

Rigorous: Research follows a strict procedure. It requires lot of hard work, both mentally and physically. Researcher needs to be consistent and persistent in his/her efforts. Research in general requires a long term commitment.

Controlled: Many research studies especially in natural sciences are carried out in ‘controlled’ conditions. Natural scientists often in laboratory conditions

control many physical aspects such as light, heat, pressure or force, etc. Even in social science research studies can also be conducted in ‘controlled’ conditions. It simply means that the researcher is manipulating one variable (the independent variable) to study the cause effect relationship. Social scientists also make use of controlled conditions. For instance, to study the impact of meditation on stress reduction, scientist can introduce meditation sessions in one group of participants after such sessions are held. After some period, stress levels of both groups are measured again to see the impact of meditation. This is called controlled conditions in research.

Systematic: This implies that the research work follows specific stages and tasks. For instance, formulation of objectives is followed by chalking out sampling details. The different steps cannot be taken in a haphazard way.

Empirical: Research is based on direct experience or observation by the researcher. This means that researcher collects data himself or herself using specific methods, techniques and tools.

Critical: Research requires critical enquiry into a social problem or phenomenon. It begins with certain questions like ‘why’, and ‘how’. This critical analysis helps in finding the ‘truth’.

For the process to be called research, it is imperative that it has the above characteristics.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

1) What are the basic characteristics of research?

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1.3 NATURAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

In general, science is understood as an endeavour to understand, explain and predict the world around us. Science entails distinctive method of enquiry having the characteristics such as objectivity, reliability, verifiability, etc., that we have studied above. Science has two main branches – natural science [which deals with the physical world, for instance, physical, chemistry, geology, biology, etc.] and social science [that covers the scientific study of human society and social relationships such as economics, politics, social work, and so on]. So, social science is the study of human characteristics and behaviours, psychological traits and the interaction of socio-cultural factors whereas the natural sciences deal with the studies and activities surrounding the Universe and Earth’s resources.

Until 18th century, humans usually used to provide metaphysical reasons for natural and physical events around them. For instance, thunder and lightning, which is a natural phenomenon, was interpreted as 'God is angry'. Likewise, floods and droughts were seen as punishment invoked upon societies due to the wrong-doings of the people. Superstitions and wrong beliefs were rampant as humans tried to make sense of natural events around them.

In this backdrop, Auguste Comte laid the foundation of scientific approach or science as he said that nothing should be believed unless and until it is tested through five senses. This concept is known as Positivism. The term 'Positivism' is used to describe an approach to the study of society that relies specifically on scientific evidences, such as experiments and statistics, to explore the true nature of operations of social systems.

Let us, take the example of falling of apple and discovery of gravity by Newton. Since Newton did not 'believe' in any preconceived ideas, he questioned why the apple fell down on the earth and did not go up...this enquiry led to the path-breaking discovery of gravitational force. Auguste Comte also asserted that questioning and verification through empirical investigations should form the basis of knowledge generation in social sciences too. The notion of positivism also claimed that there should be 'methodological uniformity' between natural and social science research. However, practically, it is a very difficult proposition. It is indeed very difficult to have rigorous and 'controlled' experiments in social sciences for both ethical and practical reasons.

Natural science research is largely based on experimentation having repeated observations of natural phenomenon. In social science, the process of observation very often interrupts the social interactions attempting to be observed. It is often non-repeatable experimentation. For instance, in laboratory conditions, you may add molecules of hydrogen gas with oxygen gas to form water. Even if thousand times, this experiment is repeated, you will get the same result. However, while observing human behavior, even the second time you cannot get exactly the same result.

While in natural science research, full objectivity can be maintained; in social science research personal biases and prejudices may distort the data and analysis, thus, subjectivity is more common.

In laboratories of natural science experimentations, achieving 'controlled' conditions is relatively easier. Contrarily, in social science research, laboratory is society or the world at large and researchers have no control over the multifarious factors that influence human behaviours.

In social science research, findings of study are at best generalizations, while in natural science research the results of investigations are best theorized as natural laws.

Most often, the results of natural science research can be verified through our five senses while social phenomena are largely abstract, expressed symbolically and difficult to observe. We can observe behavior but not what goes inside the mind of a human being who is our subject of study.

The data obtained through natural science research are reliable, verifiable and consistent while data gathered in social science research inherently carry significant variations.

Natural science stresses quantitative research and there is no emotional connect between the researcher and the object of research. On the other hand, ‘controlling’ researchers’ subjectivity, prejudices, and emotions in social science research is quite difficult. Studying society and human behavior often makes use of qualitative approach or mix method approach.

In natural science experiments, presence of scientists does not in any way influence the results. Stated differently, presence or absence of researchers does not influence the object of study. In contrast, in social science research, the mere presence of researcher hampers the natural behavior of the subjects under study. This is called “Hawthorne effect”. If you go to a class, say fifth standard children in a school to observe, with your presence, the children would not behave the way they would have in your absence.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

- 1) Differentiate between natural and social science research.

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1.4 NEED OF RESEARCH

Research is a highly valued aspect across the world. Its contribution to human civilization is vast and vital. Research in both natural and social science has played a critical role in the progress and development achieved so far. Let us now understand the need and purpose of research.

Research in public health has led to decrease in mortality rates and increase in life expectancy. We have eliminated many dreadful diseases from the world as research has led to an expansion of knowledge and discovery of new medical treatments and cures. Immunization programmes are saving the lives of millions of children; antibiotics and life-saving drugs are discovered, which was not possible a couple of centuries back. Even at the time of Independence of India, life expectancy was merely 35 years, which now is nearly 67 years. We are healthier and living longer than our ancestors, thanks to scientists and researchers working on medicinal advancement and health improvement.

Diagnosis and treatment of all the health ailments like diabetes, blood pressure, cancer, etc., and mental health problems such as schizophrenia, neurosis, bipolar disorders, and such others, by the doctors and psychiatrists are facilitated by research work.

Research has also led to breakthroughs in agriculture, with the introduction of high yield and drought resistant crop varieties. This has helped in achieving self-sufficiency in food security in the country. Buying food grains and other items from foreign countries would have drained scarce economic resources. Projections about the deteriorating effects of climate change are helping in designing of better coping interventions, which is made possible through research.

With advancement of technology, through research, we are able to send satellites in the space that has transformed and fastened the communication system in the entire world. Bridges and roads, airplanes and trains, cars and other vehicles, have eased our lives and within few hours we can travel from one corner of the world to another, which was unthinkable a few generations back. When we look around, all the gadgets and equipments, modern infrastructure, every machine that is making our life easier has been the outcome of research efforts at various levels.

The discoveries and inventions of computers, the Internet, wi-fi, etc., has helped us improving our access to education and developmental facilities.

Even in social science and humanities, research studies help the government and civil society organizations in fact-finding to know the magnitude and intensity of human problems for which services and programmes can be designed and also aid in evaluating their welfare and development programmes. The Planning Commission (now called Niti Ayog) takes up many research and evaluation studies before the actual national level planning process is initiated and Five Year plans are given shape. Research gives us insight to plan interventions for betterment of human life. The social welfare and development programmes and schemes that were designed without thorough research on the needs and problems of target communities, merely based on assumptions, have failed terribly to deliver the desired results.

Research helps us in acquisition and extension of knowledge. And the knowledge is the essential ingredient to all the discoveries and inventions. Research studies lead to theorization which helps in developing better understanding of the world around us.

Research facilitates assessment of a situation or a problem at hand. Proper assessment or diagnosis is critical for effective treatment in any human service profession like Medicine, nursing, counseling and social work. Through research, psychologists are able to understand, explain and predict human behaviours. This helps in determining disorders and their impact on the person and society, thereby giving insight in developing appropriate treatments to improve the individual's quality of life.

Market research has helped business companies to understand needs of the community and consumption habits, make predictions about product usage and formulate appropriate strategies to ensure sales and profits.

Research and Development go hand in hand. You may come across R&D (Research and Development) Division in most of the ministries, departments, educational institutions, defence academies, medical institutions, science and technology, engineering, media and communication studies.

Research is necessary for gathering information before designing any social work intervention. Research provides us all the relevant information about the field before we begin our work. For instance, research would provide us causes of female foeticide in certain villages of Haryana so that accurate intervention can be designed accordingly. Most organizations do research before beginning a project in order to get the basic idea about the things they will need to do for the project. Research also helps in locating the resources, human and material, and profile of the target groups.

1.5 SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH AS A METHOD OF SOCIAL WORK

As mentioned earlier, social work research is a secondary or auxiliary method of social work practice. You may recall – social casework, social group work and community organization are the primary methods of social work and social action, social welfare administration and social work research are the secondary methods.

Social work research may be defined as systematic investigation into the problems in the field of social work. In simple terms, social work research is the act of investigating contributing factors to problems that clients are facing. For instance, we may conduct research on societal causes of homelessness or the factors that are resulting in drug abuse among school children.

Social work research is taken as a sub-set of social research. It is the application of research methods to identify and solve problems that social workers confront in their field practice. Social work research not only stresses on acquisition of knowledge but also application of that knowledge to improve the lives of the people. It employs the methodology of social research and illustrates its applications in social work settings. Since social work is a practice profession, the focus of social work research is more towards utilization of knowledge gained through research for human good. While most of the disciplines of humanities and social sciences use research for better understanding of the area or topic of the study and developing theories after looking at the trends, social work research adopts a utilitarian approach. It means that social work research is focused towards gaining better understanding of causal factors of human sufferings and striving to improve methods and services to ameliorate conditions of misery and pain. Thus, the prime objective of social work research is to search for improving interventions or treatment effectiveness in social work practice. It aims to utilize the findings of the research for betterment of service delivery system.

The scope of social work research is very wide. Some of the topics or areas where research work has been carried out are factors affecting accessibility and affordability of services such as health and social security among the poor and vulnerable population groups (like Dalits, tribals, women, children, aged); efficacy of prison reforms; implications of family disorganization on children; every-day challenges of street and working children; life situations of trafficked women and children; domestic violence, abuse and exploitation, beggary; impact of various government initiatives in the field of social welfare; and many others. We can categorize these areas of research into three broad types –

**Social Research
and Social Work
Research**

- Research studies aimed at better understanding of causal and precipitating factors that increase vulnerabilities and marginalization of various social groups like scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, women, children, elderly, youth, etc.;
- Evaluation and impact studies of several interventions, schemes and programmes by the government and civil society bodies; and
- Research work to gauge effectiveness of social work methods, strategies, skills, values and principles for addressing a range of social problems.

Thus, developing concepts, ethical principles, theories underlying social work methods, skills and values are also the major areas of social work research. The methodologies, tools and techniques of information collection in social work research are the same as social research. However, the focus of research is more on finding best possible interventions to solve social problems.

Social work research provides information that can be taken into consideration by social workers prior to making decisions that affect their clients or agency-programmes. It seeks to understand the relationship of social workers with their clients as a variable to influence desired behavior change. The knowledge gained through research work is useful in appraising the effectiveness of methods and techniques of social work. It enhances efficiency and impact of social work practice. It also offers an opportunity for social workers to make a difference or modification in their practice. Through conducting social work research and utilizing the knowledge gained in the practice, a social worker becomes more dexterous and professionally competent.

Stated differently, social work research attempts to provide knowledge about what interventions or treatments actually help or hinder the attainment of social work goals. In addition, it also helps in searching for answers to problems or difficulties faced by social work practitioners in service delivery system. Additionally, it helps building knowledge-base for social work theory and practice. Social work research helps social workers in becoming more effective practitioners. It gives insight into multi-dimensional nature of social problems and best practices to address those problems. Thus, social work research facilitates in numerous ways the achievement of goals of social work practice.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

1) What are the three broad types of research?

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1.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we learnt about the meaning of research, which is a scientific process of gathering factual information. Certain basic characteristics of research such as objectivity, verifiability, reliability, prediction, were discussed. The relation and differences between natural and social science research were described. The relevance and need of research in human life was looked into. Lastly, we learnt about social work research as one of the methods of social work practice.

1.7 KEY WORDS

- Research** : Systematic and scientific enquiry to gain knowledge about a natural or social phenomenon.
- Natural Science** : It is a branch of science concerned with the description, prediction, and understanding of natural phenomena, based on observational and empirical evidence.
- Social science research** : Social science research is a systematic investigation into social systems, institutions, phenomena and diverse aspects of human behaviour.

1.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 2 SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH: MEANING, SCOPE AND USES

*Prof. Archana Kaushik

Contents

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Meaning of Social Research
- 2.3 Social Research and Social Work Research: Similarities and Differences
- 2.4 Scope of social work research
- 2.5 Uses of social work research
- 2.6 Social work research: Relation with other methods
- 2.7 Let us sum up
- 2.8 Key words
- 2.9 Suggested readings

2.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit would enable you to: (1) focus on understanding the meaning and scope of social work research. (2) define the meaning of social work research (3) differentiate between social research and social work research, (4) appraise the scope of social work research, (5) develop understanding about the uses of social work research (6) gauge the relation of social work research with other methods of social work discipline.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Among the methods of social work, social work research is an auxiliary or secondary method. It is, one of the most crucial aspects of any meaningful social work intervention. It is the application of research methods to the production of knowledge which, in turn, is used to solve the problems social workers encounter during their practice. Social work research is a subset of social research. The knowledge gained through the research helps in making social work interventions more efficient and effective.

The scope of social work research is very vast. Just as social work as a human service profession can be practiced in almost all the situations – at the curative, ameliorative, preventive or managerial levels – in diverse fields like women and child, youth and aged, health and mental health, correctional and disaster management, etc. - all these fields form the scope of social work research too.

Let us first understand the meaning of social research.

2.2 MEANING OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

In unit 1, we understood the difference between natural science research and social science research. Certain basic features of social research are discussed here in detail.

Social research is the systematic process of pre-planned enquiry into any of the varied aspects of human life. It is the careful and critical investigation to discover new facts and/or verify old ones with the objective of finding various causes of social problems. Its ultimate objective is betterment of human life. After gaining insight about the social problems through research remedial interventions can be carried out. Moser defines social research as “a systematized investigation to gain new knowledge about social phenomena and problems”. Likewise, according to Young, “social research is a scientific undertaking which by means of logical methods, aim to discover new facts or old facts and to analyze their sequences, interrelationships, casual explanations and natural laws which govern them.” Social research can be defined as the systematic and objective analysis and recording of controlled observations that may lead to the development of generalization, principles or theories resulting in predictions so that negative social change can be geared towards the positive direction. It contributes to existing body of knowledge. And at times, it corrects and replaces the old body of knowledge about human behaviours and social processes. Social research is a broad term that includes research conducted by varied inter-related yet distinct disciplines like sociology, psychology, anthropology and social work.

Social research aims to facilitate the understanding of human behavior through the usage of well-defined and rigorous methodology. It intends to acquire knowledge about social phenomena, problems, events, etc. Its objective is to find out the natural laws that regulate or direct social phenomena. Social research tends to standardize the principles governing societal functioning and human behaviours. It is also directed towards funding and formulating solutions to social problems.

Social research essentially deals with human beings. Since, human behaviours and actions are much more complex than natural phenomena, social research too is more complex than the natural research. The overall goal of social research is to gain better insight into human behaviours and human interactions.

From the viewpoint of relevance, social research is directed towards finding the solutions of social problems. Skewed power equations, caste discrimination, gender bias, marginalization and exploitation of weaker sections like aged, women, children, and Dalits, etc., are some of the dominant problems of Indian society. Various disciplines of social sciences like sociology, anthropology, developmental studies, social work, behavioural sciences, and such others, within their domains explore causal factors of these social problems and try to find solutions for betterment of humanity.

Unlike natural science research, social sciences do not have well established cause and effect relationships. One outcome (say exhibition of anger) can have multiple causes. Society is the function of human interactions and relationships. Human behaviour is influenced by many interlinked factors. To exemplify, a man exhibiting violence at home may be outcome of one or several factors like

faulty learning (he has seen his father beating his mother), stress and tension at workplace (he couldn't show his anger towards his boss, so the easier targets are his wife and children). Thus, often social problems and social situations are multi-pronged and multi-dimensional and research provides us the required knowledge to understand the interplay of these variables.

Moreover, in social science we cannot say with conviction that an individual will behave in a peculiar way in a particular situation. This prediction is possible in natural science only. Thus, in social science we observe associations between different related variable (for example: drug addiction is strongly related to incongruent family relations or illiteracy is directly and strongly related to poverty) rather than cause-effect relations. There may be high probability that children from poor and dysfunctional families are prone to delinquency but not all the children coming from such families indulge in anti-social activities, many even succeed in acquiring respectable social status due to their hard-work and commitment.

2.3 SOCIAL RESEARCH AND SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

As social work discipline comes under the faculty of social sciences, social work research is also considered a sub-set or part of social research. Let us now understand similarities and differences between social research and social work research.

Social research means systematic efforts to gain new knowledge or verify old facts about particular social phenomenon and certain aspects of human behaviours. Stated otherwise, social research is a systematic method of discovering new facts or verifying old facts, identification and explanation of inter-relationship of various causal and precipitating factors, their implications, and the natural laws which govern them.

Social work research includes the study of social problems and their causes, ramifications of these problems, the interventions that aim to handle and solve them. It studies needs of the people in vulnerable and disadvantaged situations and the efficacy of support services offered to them.

Social science research focuses on gaining knowledge about the characteristics and functioning of various social institutions, descriptions of social phenomena and probable explanations of rules and principles governing social order in a social system or society. In juxtaposition, social work research deals with the problem identification, explaining the nature and types of marginalization, exclusion, abuse and violations of human rights and measuring vulnerabilities and the exploration of probable solutions to address the problems at hand.

While social science research is geared towards theory building and acquisition of knowledge, social work research focuses on utilitarian aspect of research – that is, using the knowledge gained for ameliorating human sufferings. Social work discipline strongly advocates that the research should be able to help the target community and should give insight into development of effective intervention strategies, rather than merely accumulation of knowledge.

Social work research deals with the issues and problems that social workers confront in their practice. On the other hand, social sciences research is more generic and studies the changing social trends, functioning of society, culture, social institutions, etc.

Oftentimes, social work research also pays attention to the challenges, expertise and competence of social work practitioners so that the insight gained through research can help the profession itself to grow further. Social work research aims to improve its practice methods and strategies so as to gain more proficiency in service delivery system. In recent times, many studies have been taken up by social workers that focus on the relevance and effectiveness of social work values, principles and methods. So, apart from studying the practice fields like correctional setting, rural-urban community development, school social work, medical and psychiatric setting, social work research also intends to study ‘practitioners’ too. Contrarily, social science research is more focused to explore, explain, document and predict social phenomena so as to theorize and verify factual information.

Though research methodology specifically depends upon the topics selected, certain recent methodological frameworks like qualitative research, evaluation research and action research are more apt for social work research as they are mainly application based. Social sciences use qualitative research methods to predict and verify knowledge and developing theories. Rigorous qualitative methods like ethnography are used to describe and explain a unique social system.

Let us now look at similarities between social science research and social work research. Firstly, both are largely becoming inter-disciplinary in their approach. Social work has been a practice based profession, and now we are encountering emergence of newer disciplines like ‘Applied psychology’, ‘Applied Sociology’ and such others. Both types of research share similar approaches, research designs, and methodological details like sampling procedures, tools for data collection and statistical packages for analysis. In terms of the research process, there is hardly any difference between social science research and social work research.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

- 1) What are some of the initiatives between social research and social work research?

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2) List out the differences between social research and social work research.
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2.4 SCOPE OF SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH

The scope of social work is very vast – it deals with almost every aspect of human life; so, is the case with social work research. As social worker is a practice profession, social work research has a goal to search for answers to address social problems and to enhance effectiveness of social work practice. The scope of social work research can be understood under the following domains:

- 1. Studying social problems:** More often than not, social work research precedes any intervention carried out by social workers in the field practice. Before any service or programme is implemented, the factors contributing to social problems are explored through research. Baseline research is done to find the causal factors and on the basis of findings, interventions are planned. From grassroots organizations to national level planning bodies, like Niti Ayog, research is done to study various facets of social problems so that services and programmes can be designed accordingly.
- 2. Practice settings:** Social work research is carried out in all the fields of social work practice such as rural and urban communities, families and children, youth development, health and mental health settings, disaster management, disability, aged, infirm, education, conflict resolution, Dalits, tribal groups, communal violence, gender issues, crime, abuse, exploitation, labour bondage, livelihood issues, poverty and such others. There are numerous areas within each practice setting where social work research has been or is being taken up.
- 3. Improving competence of social workers:** Another crucial area of social work research is directed towards enhancing and upgrading competence and expertise of social workers who are the change agents. Research has been conducted on studying the efficacy of various methods and various strategies and tools of social work practice in different settings to bring about the desired change in the social environment and for optimum growth and development of human life. In addition, research work is also done on effectiveness of social work education, in terms of its contents and fieldwork models during training of students and in practice areas. Insight, thus gained, has helped in improving the syllabi and modalities of internship or fieldwork. Moreover, setting specific skills and knowledge base, for instance, social work with children, advocacy and social action, are also researched upon so as to increase dexterity of social workers in these fields.

4. **Types of research:** Social work research has been taken up using wide range of research designs, approaches, methods and tools. Quantitative methods are used to gather information related to magnitude of the problem while qualitative methods are employed to understand the nature and attributes of the issue at hand. Often mixed method studies are taken up. Evaluation and impact studies, action and intervention research are also quite frequently used methods in social work research.
5. **Research Agencies:** Social work research is carried out by diverse institutions and organizations. At the University level, through Ph.D., M. Phil. and dissertations at postgraduate levels social work research is undertaken where focus is more on adding to existing pool of social work literature and theory building. Civil society organizations and various government bodies (NGOs, Ministries, research organizations, etc.) also take up research work, mainly to study feasibility of proposed social welfare programmes or impact assessment of existing or completed projects and schemes.
6. **Social work approaches:** As social work approaches have evolved from charity and welfare to development and empowerment orientation, social work research has also changed its focus to suit the requirement. In the present times, rights based frameworks are used in social work research to study abuse, exploitation, marginalization, violence and discrimination observed in the field settings while studies carried out in post-Independence era were more frequently having welfare approach.

Social work research is undertaken to study diverse range of social issues. Studies have been done and are being done on infants, children, adolescents, youth, middle aged, and older persons, men, women and transgenders. Areas of study are very vast covering health, education, shelter, well-being, abuse, conflict, stigma, discrimination, caste and religious discrimination, minority issues, sexual orientation, and such others. Advocacy, impacts of social legislations, social action, transparency in service delivery system, violation of human rights, ecology and environmental concerns, are the topics in the contemporary times for social work research. From preventive to developmental, ameliorative to rehabilitative – different approaches are studied under the gamut of social work with the overall goal of reducing human sufferings and enhancing democratic values, social justice, participative approach and ensuring rights to all human beings.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

- 1) Give a list of the domains of social work research.

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2.5 USES OF SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH

Social work research plays a significant role in social work education and practice. Let us enlist some of the salient uses of social work research.

1. Social work research helps in production of knowledge. This knowledge builds the scientific base of social work profession, provides special body of knowledge, skills and values. Research tests the hypothesis and assumptions about various facets of social work practice. It creates pool of literature in social work having theories and practice models, methods and tools of working with people. Social work research continuously adds to this pool of social work literature by testing and verifying theories and creating new ones. In this way, social work research plays a crucial role in the growth and expansion of the social work discipline and profession.
2. With formative research and baseline surveys, social work research gives insight into planning of social welfare and development programmes. Such well-designed programmes have better rate of success than the ones based on mere assumptions. So, in a way, social work research helps in effective utilization of scarce resources, financial, material and human, through thoughtful planning. All other components of administration like staffing, coordinating, directing, budgeting, etc., rely on planning. Effective planning kick-starts all other components of administration, thereby ensuring successful implementation of the programmes.
3. Programme and policy evaluation is another domain where social work research has huge claim. From a small grassroot organization to national and international agencies, utilize research to develop understanding of the social problems and evaluation of social welfare and development schemes and programmes. Even policy formulation and evaluation is done through social work research. In addition, mid-term evaluations of schemes and programmes help in addressing unexpected challenges and deviations, if any. It also helps in effective monitoring and execution of the projects and programmes.
4. Social work research helps in enhancing competence and expertise of service providers by informing which strategies and models give positive results. For instance, intervention research may suggest that group work is an effective method in enhancing social functioning of children in institutionalized setting. This information can be used by social workers working in children's homes.
5. Social work research helps in better understanding of the target groups and communities which further facilitates programme implementation. Oftentimes, while conducting research, observing the community and talking to the inhabitants, rapport formation takes places, which makes the process of project implementation much easier.
6. Locating causal factors of a social problem, social work research, provides better analytical ability, critical thinking skills and reflective practice. It ensures greater effectiveness and efficiency in programme implementation.

7. Social work research highlights best practices in various field settings that can be replicated and scaled up. To exemplify, a pilot research on using counseling for HIV testing after showing credible results can be replicated in various parts of the state or country.
8. It also guarantees cost effectiveness. Social workers look for such practice-models that require minimum investments with maximum positive impacts. Social work research provides information about such strategies and models. Careful planning also leads to cost effectiveness.
9. Awareness generation is an important aspect of social work practice. Social workers are required to create awareness on the issue they are working upon. Social work research helps in designing the message in such a way that awareness campaigns achieve success easily.
10. Similarly, social workers utilize strategies to bring about positive behaviour change among the target communities on several issues like sending children to school, developing healthy habits of hand-washing or using toilets. Social work research helps in generating and refining behavior change communication models that bring about desired change in attitudes and practices, which otherwise is quite challenging.
11. Social work research helps in effective use of other methods of social work like casework, group work, community organization, social action and social welfare administration.

Social work research facilitates building knowledge base, enhancing skills and theorizing models of field practice. Its scope and uses are vast. Wherever, social work intervention takes place, the application of social work research can be seen there.

2.6 SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH: RELATION WITH OTHER METHODS

Social work research is one of the secondary methods of social work practice. In this section, we will look into the relation of social work research with other primary and secondary methods of social work practice.

Case work is a primary method of social work that focuses on the problems of individuals. It views the individual client in his/her environment and aims to resolve constraining and conflicting situations by enhancing his/her coping skills. It involves diagnosis of the problems individual clients are facing and chalking out treatment plan. Social work research provides knowledge to caseworker about various behavioural and social problems an individual encounters. This knowledge facilitates problem diagnosis. And only correct problem diagnosis can result in effective treatment plan. Here too, social work research provides insight to caseworker in using appropriate behavior modification strategies such as reinforcement or systematic desensitization.

The goal of group work is to enhance social functioning of the people using the experience of 'group'. Social workers make use of this method quite often in different field settings like schools, communities, hospitals, workplace, etc. The group worker makes use of several theories to understand the psyche of

groups members (such as social learning, social distance) and to appraise the stages through which group is passing through (forming, storming, norming, performing). All these theoretical underpinnings are the result of social work research. In the contemporary times, many scholars are trying to study the effectiveness of group work in addressing specific vulnerabilities and challenges faced by clients. For instance, in a hospital setting, group work with terminally ill patients or diabetics or those suffering from any life-style diseases have proved quite beneficial in the treatment and recovery process. Such research work helps the social workers for effective use of group-work in varied situations.

Community organization is another basic method of social work that aims to work on the felt needs of the community people, help inhabitants prioritize their needs, identify resources and in this process develop participatory and democratic values of collaborating and shared living. Social work research is used in baseline survey to find the felt and implied needs of community people. Research techniques like participatory rural appraisal, rapid rural appraisal are specifically used in community organization and community work. Understanding of notions like power dynamics, discrimination and marginalization have particular relevance in community organization. And these notions are the outcomes of social work research, which help community worker in identifying barriers in building just and egalitarian communities and developing strategies to deal with those barriers.

Social action is an auxiliary method of social work that focuses on providing equitable share of public resources and justice to the victimized and marginalized sections of the population. Social work research helps in problem assessment and in understanding the power-dynamics in the community. Through research work, a social actionist is able to understand the implications of previous movements and social actions that have taken place and effectively using media advocacy, administrative advocacy, legislative advocacy, strategies and tools of social action and the like. Best practices in social movement and social action are documented through research and can be adapted and replicated by other social workers in their respective field settings.

Social welfare administration is a method of social work that is related to execution and management of social welfare and development services. Its components are planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting and budgeting. Social work research plays crucial role in gathering relevant information needed for planning. Using various tools of social work research, the social problem is studied carefully, scientifically and objectively. And on sound planning the success of project implementation depends. Evaluation of implemented projects and programmes and impact analysis are the significant aspects of social work research.

Social work research is also inter-related with the contemporary methods of social work. For any project on advocacy, social work research method is essential. Similarly for networking and awareness campaign too social work research plays an important role. In order to mobilize resources as well as for strengths based practice, social work research is crucial. Those interested in public interest litigation has to first engage themselves in both empirical study as well as research based on secondary data to collect relevant information that are authentic on the topic.

Thus, social work research is highly interrelated with other methods of social work practice.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

- 1) List out the uses of social work research.

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2.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you learnt the meaning of social research, which is studying the structures, systems and institutions of society. While social research focuses on the social aspects of human beings, social work research, which is a part of social research, is more geared towards exploring causal factors of social problems and finding their solutions. You learnt about the similarities and differences between social research and social work research. The scope of social work research is very vast and this research is carried out in almost all the situations where social work interventions take place. Some of the significant uses of social work research are described in this unit. Lastly, relation of social work research with other methods of social work such as casework, group work, community organization, social welfare administration and social action has been delineated.

2.8 KEY WORDS

- Social Research** : It is research conducted by social scientists following a systematic plan on social systems, institutions, structures and phenomena. Disciplines like sociology, psychology, anthropology, social work, etc., conduct social research on various themes and topics.
- Social Work Research** : It is the application of research methods to solve problems that social workers confront in their practice and also to improve service delivery systems and mechanisms.

2.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 3 TYPES OF RESEARCH

*Prof. Archana Kaushik

Contents

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Qualitative and quantitative methods
- 3.3 Research Designs
- 3.4 Other classifications of Research
- 3.5 Let us sum up
- 3.6 Key words
- 3.7 Suggested readings

3.0 OBJECTIVES

Research can be classified in many ways. After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Learn about various categories of research such as qualitative and quantitative approaches;
- Describe prominent research designs like descriptive, exploratory and experimental;
- Know about types of data collection based on sources (primary and secondary), longitudinal and cross-sectional research, etc., and
- Examine triangulation of research approaches, methods, and tools of data collection.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Social science research is the study of human life. Since problems, challenges and life situations of human life are multi-dimensional and full of complex interplay of various factors; its study cannot be done through unitary method. So, social research has several approaches, methods and tools of data collection.

Quantitative and qualitative researches are the two main approaches in social science. When you study about the number of street children in Delhi who are indulging in drug addiction and related details, you are using quantitative approach, which focuses on numbers. If your research is to document the experiences of victims of domestic violence then qualitative research would be more appropriate.

Research is mainly categorized into three main designs – Exploratory (it is used in cases when very little is known about the topic at hand), Descriptive (it focuses on describing the situation or phenomenon that is being studied) and

Experimental (it tends to study cause and effect relationship between variables under study).

This apart, now-a-days, mix method research studies are being carried out where certain aspects of qualitative and quantitative approaches are used in the same research.

3.2 QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE METHODS

In the world of social research, two general approaches are followed for collecting and analyzing data. They are quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative approach tends to focus on numbers as it looks at the magnitude, scale or extent of the problem by collecting information from a large number of individuals using survey methods. On the other hand, qualitative approach to research focuses on documenting the views, perceptions and experiences of respondents. It stresses on how people (or respondents) view the situation or problem or phenomenon under the study. Both approaches have their sets of advantages and disadvantages, about which we will study in this section.

Quantitative Research

Quantitative Research is used to quantify the problem by way of generating numerical data or data that can be transformed into useable statistics. It is used to quantify attitudes, opinions, behaviors, and other defined variables – and generalize results from a larger sample population. For instance, if you wish to know about the perceptions of general public about the functioning of police (their promptness to record FIR, their conduct and mannerism, etc.) quantitative research would be suitable option.

Quantitative data collection methods are much more structured than Qualitative data collection methods. Quantitative data collection methods include various forms of surveys – online surveys, paper surveys, mobile surveys and kiosk surveys, face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, longitudinal studies, website interceptors, online polls, and systematic observations.

Quantitative research is characterized by high reliability and validity. It helps in prediction of outcomes. It is scientific and its results can be verified. Quantitative research tells us about the gravity of problem and helps in formulation of appropriate plans and programmes. To exemplify, if you know how many children are to be immunized in a community, financial and other resources can be accordingly allocated. This research helps us generalize the data and hence relevant for policy level decision making. However, since data are collected from large population, it is a costly proposition and requires much effort.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is relatively recent approach in the field of research. For decades, only quantitative research with strict adherence to collection of factual and numerical information and its analysis using statistical methods qualified to be called a research. Gradually, researchers realized that in order to make research more utilitarian, people's experiences and feeling should be given more importance than mere facts. This resulted in qualitative approach. It focuses

on describing a phenomenon in a comprehensive and intensive manner. This approach generally makes use of in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and unobtrusive observation. In most cases, only a small number of respondents or research participants are researched. Methods used in qualitative research frequently employ unstructured or semi-structured, open ended questions. It focuses on the richness of data rather than calculating frequencies of responses.

Qualitative Research is primarily exploratory research. It is used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations and to uncover trends in thought and opinions, and dive deeper into the problem. It provides insights into the problem or helps to develop ideas or hypotheses for potential quantitative research.

For instance, suppose you are studying the manifestations of discrimination against HIV positive patients in hospital setting. In this regard, you are interviewing doctors and nurses. During in-depth interviews one nurse may tell you ten different ways in which they treat HIV positive patients differently than others while another nurse may inform about just one expression of differential treatment amounting to abuse. In qualitative research, you would document all the ways of discrimination rather than telling how many nurses or doctors responded on which discriminatory practice.

Advantages of qualitative research may be looked into. It helps us understand identification of factors or variables in situations about which we do not have much information. So, for formative research, qualitative approach is apt. Also, it allows researchers to understand the deeper thoughts and feelings of respondents, which otherwise are not possible to explore. For instance, qualitative research would help us understand how an HIV positive person feels when discriminated and how he/she copes. It provides ‘rich’ data about various aspects of human life. Some of the limitations of qualitative approach are – findings cannot be generalized. Often transcription, analysis and interpretation of qualitative data become quite tedious and confusing.

Now-a-days, social scientists are making use of mix-method approaches where both qualitative and quantitative approaches are simultaneously applied. In such studies information on certain variables are gathered, codified and analyzed in numerical form while other information is of qualitative in nature. This provides researchers benefits of both the approaches. Same is applicable in methods of data collection. For instance, interviewing technique can be used adopting close ended and open ended questions. Close ended questions can be pre-coded and quantified while open ended questions capture the qualitative attributes of the respondents.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

- 1) Define quantitative method of research.

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2) Briefly describe the concept of quantitative research method.

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3.3 RESEARCH DESIGNS

Research design is basically the plan of a research study. The design of a study defines the study type (descriptive, experimental, or exploratory) and sub-types (longitudinal, case study, etc.) research questions, hypotheses, dependent and independent variables, data collection methods, etc. Research design is the framework that has been created to seek answers to research questions. Research can be classified based on the research design as follows.

Exploratory Research Design

As the name suggests, this research design explores relatively un-researched area, about which the literature of our discipline has dearth of information. It includes studying of a problem about which nothing or very little is known. An exploratory research design is used for research problems or areas/topics about which there are very few or no studies have been conducted to refer to. This research design focuses on developing an insight and familiarity on the research problem or topic. Sociologists and social work researchers have taken up exploratory studies to gain familiarity and information about certain remote tribal groups for which we had very little knowledge. Generally, ethnographic research is planned using exploratory designs. In subsequent chapters you would study about this method.

Exploratory research design provides lot of flexibility in terms of objectives, sampling process and sources and methods of data collection. Since researcher enters into an unknown area, no rigid approach is followed. This research design never has hypothesis and is basically qualitative in nature.

Exploratory studies often precede more systematic enquiry into the field by way of obtaining preliminary information about that community or group. This design is useful for gaining background information on a particular topic. Exploratory research generally utilizes small sample sizes and, thus, findings cannot be generalized to the population at large. However, it lacks rigorous standards of methods of data collection and analysis. It focuses on exploring newer areas of research. Thus, exploratory research designs provide insight but not definitive conclusions in the study at hand.

Descriptive Research Design

Descriptive research designs are aimed at obtaining information and describing at length about the social phenomenon or social group or community or system. It 'describes' what exists with respect to variables or conditions in a situation. It is concerned with existing conditions or relationships between different variables, prevailing practices and belief system, attitudes and processes of the social situation or phenomenon that is being studied. Descriptive research designs help provide answers to the questions of who, what, when, where, and how associated with a particular research problem, though with strong conclusive evidences researchers may not be able to answer 'why'. In behavioural and social sciences, descriptive research designs are most frequently used and are considered 'appropriate'. It offers wide range of mix method approaches and methods and tools of data collection under its gamut. Descriptive studies can yield rich data that lead to important recommendations in practice.

In descriptive research designs, subjects are observed and studied in natural surroundings. It may be noted that findings of descriptive research designs cannot be used to conclusively accept or reject hypotheses. It usually has research questions in place of hypotheses. Descriptive research studies are often the simplest forms of researches in terms of intricacies of sampling and usage of data collection methods and techniques. In comparison to exploratory research design, it is more specific and less flexible in nature.

An example of descriptive research design can be studying the situation of elderly people living all alone in urban areas, their health conditions, loneliness, fears and anxieties, their management of daily living, their vulnerabilities and strengths. In this, researcher describes the situation of elderly people in detail focusing on what are their needs and problems, how they are coping in urban setting in contemporary times.

Experimental Research Design

Experimental research designs are aimed at finding the cause and effect relationships between variables. Among the three types of research designs, experimental studies are most rigid, strictly follow the research procedures and adhere to statistical parameters for analysis. Because of this, validity and reliability of such research studies are high. This research design formulates hypotheses and research process is directed to collect evidences to accept or reject hypotheses.

Derived from positivist approach, experimental research designs tend to strike similarity with natural science research. It implies that researchers using experimental designs seek to understand the causal relationship between two or more variables. Here, certain factors or variables are 'controlled' so see the effect of the variables under study. Experimental research design allows the researcher to control the situation so that the answer to the question, "What causes something to occur?" can be found. It permits the researcher to identify cause-effect relationships between variables.

The classic experimental design specifies an experimental group and a control group. [For instance, two groups of youth addicted to smoking can be studied to understand the impact of 'fear instilling videos' on their smoking quitting

behaviours.] The independent variable is administered to the experimental group and not to the control group, and both groups are measured on the same dependent variable. [Here, experimental group is shown videos where smokers are shown suffering from cancer and in acute pain while in control group no such video is shown. And after time T1, researchers note how many of the participants have quit smoking. If most participants from experiment group have quit smoking, then the impact of videos is established.]

Experimental research designs are artificial and controlled, so large sample size cannot be taken. This makes generalization of findings to the large population groups difficult. Moreover, the artificial settings of experiments may alter the behaviors or responses of participants, or true responses may get hidden. Experimental designs are difficult to carry out and now-a-days, researchers are frowning at ethical concerns vis-à-vis depriving control groups with benefits of interventions. A large number of research problems cannot be studied using an experiment because of ethical or technical reasons.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

1) What are the three major research designs?

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3.4 OTHER CLASSIFICATIONS OF RESEARCH

There are many way of categorizing research studies. In this section, we will look at certain other classifications of research studies.

Primary and secondary research

Based on the sources, research can be based on Primary and Secondary data. When you, as researcher, go in the field and collect information yourself by interacting with the respondents, collect and collate information, analyze data and write report, it is called empirical study or primary research. On the other hand, if you review the studies done by other researchers and based on their findings examine the research problem your research would be arm-chair research or secondary research.

Primary research is defined as factual, firsthand accounts of the study collected by the researcher himself/herself. Irrespective of the approach of research (qualitative or quantitative or mixed), design of research (experimental, exploratory or descriptive) or methods (interview, focus group discussion, etc.) used, whatever information is collected by the researcher by going to the field himself/herself would be categorized as primary research. It is typically the original research. On the other hand, secondary research is defined as the

analysis and interpretation of primary research. It is typically known as literature review. Secondary sources can be books, journals, Internet articles, dissertations, government reports, census data, etc. while primary sources can be information received by respondents through interviews, observations, discussions, letters, diaries, photographs, speeches, and such others.

It may be noted that generally all research studies are dependent on both primary and secondary sources of data collection. Review of literature is the preliminary step of any research before formulating objectives. For example, if you wish to study the situation of street children in your area, even before formulating objectives, you will visit library and study the published material on street children. You will identify the gaps in the existing literature and then based on gaps you will formulate objectives of your study. This review of literature (or secondary study) is very crucial as you should not 'reinvent the wheel'. It means that there is no point in wasting time and resources on studying the topic that is already studied by someone else. Secondary information is also used later to analyze the primary data, to find trends, similarities and dissimilarities between findings of your primary research and secondary research. Thus, we see that data collected from both primary and secondary sources form the integral part of any research.

Pure and Applied Research

Pure research is also called as the fundamental or theoretical research. It is the basic or original research. Historically, when social science research began, its purpose was just to find the 'truth' and based on that develop theories. Its aim was to develop literature of the specific discipline. Educational institutions used to conduct research and its purpose was to discover new theories or verify or validate the older theories. Pure research has helped in getting knowledge without paying attention to the practical usage of research findings.

With the passage of time, research fraternity questioned the ethical issues regarding conducting the research where the respondents remained the passive subjects from whom researchers collected information and never looked back to their status. The utility of research was being questioned. Researchers became more conscious of the application of findings of their studies for the betterment of human life, particularly the groups and communities from where data were gathered. This gave rise to applied research. It is problem oriented and geared towards finding workable and practical solutions. Such research studies are useful for the growth and development of the society. The present day research is more focused to application of findings for betterment of human life in general and specific social group in particular.

Longitudinal and cross sectional research

A longitudinal study follows the same sample over a relatively longer period of time and makes repeated observations. For example, children of single parent families are studied at different intervals (once at their infancy stage, then during middle childhood, during adolescence, their marriage, etc.) so as to study the short term and long term impact of absence of a parent. With longitudinal surveys, the same groups of people are studied at regular intervals, enabling researchers to track changes over time and to relate them to variables

that might explain why the changes occur. Though not frequently used research design, longitudinal research studies demonstrate patterns of change and help establish the direction and magnitude of causal relationships. Measurements are taken on each variable over two or more distinct time periods. Longitudinal data facilitate the analysis of the duration of a particular phenomenon. This allows the researcher to measure change in variables over time.

On the other hand, cross-sectional research designs are most frequently used as they do not involve the time dimension. Studies rely on existing differences rather than noting down differences or changes over a period of time. Here, sample size is larger and often findings are generalized keeping in mind the contextual realities. For instance, you may study the impact of single parenthood on adolescents where fairly large number of teens from single parent families can be studied for variables like academic achievement or aggression. Cross-sectional studies can only measure differences between or among people or phenomena rather than a process of change. These studies provide a clear 'snapshot' of the outcome and the characteristics associated with it, at a specific point in time.

While longitudinal studies involve taking multiple measures over an extended period of time, cross-sectional research is focused on finding relationships between variables at one moment in time. Since cross-sectional designs generally use survey techniques to gather data, they are relatively inexpensive and take up little time to conduct in comparison to longitudinal studies.

Mixed methods Research

Mixed methods researches are more often used in contemporary times by social work researchers. As the name suggests, such studies are triangulation or amalgamation of various approaches, methods and techniques of data collection. It represents more of an approach to examining a research problem than a methodology. Mixed methods research in social work is characterized by focus on research problems that require examination of multi-level factors and cultural influences. For instance, there are multiple manifestations of gender based violence. To, study such a topic with effectiveness, a researcher requires both qualitative as well as quantitative information. Using just one method of data collection, say, in-depth interviews may not be able to capture the multifarious dimensions and expressions of gender violence.

Mixed methods in social work research provides options for using a variety of research techniques as the focus is on collection of data rather than strict and rigid methodological concerns. Now-a-days, most evaluation researches and impact studies make use of mix method approach. This research design has made the very notion of research more utilitarian and usable for betterment of human life. Apart from educational institutions, NGOs, government departments and other stakeholders are increasingly making use of mix method approach. It produces more complete and holistic knowledge and understanding of the research problem that can be used to increase the generalization of findings, helping in developing theory as well as practical usage.

In mixed methods approach, narrative and qualitative information can add meaning to numerical data and also the numerical information can provide

intensity to qualitative data. A broader and more complex research can be conducted as the social work researcher is not restricted by single method approach. Moreover, the strength of one method can be used to overcome the inherent weakness of another method.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

- 1) What do you understand by mixed methods research in social work discipline?

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3.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we studied about various categorizations of research. Social science research has two basic approaches – qualitative and quantitative. While qualitative approach focuses on attributes and experiences of respondents, quantitative approach looks at numerical data. There are three main research designs – Experimental, Descriptive and Exploratory, which are described in detail in the unit. Other categories like pure and applied research, primary and secondary research, longitudinal and cross-sectional research, mix method and such others are mentioned briefly.

3.6 KEY WORDS

- Qualitative approach** : It is an approach to research that focuses on discovering the quality of some phenomenon or event or individuals highlighting their peculiarities and essential characteristics and uses inductive methods to attempt to discover new explanation.
- Quantitative approach** : It is an approach to data collection that measures quantitative attributes of some phenomenon or event or individuals and attempts to find support in the real world for a theoretical explanation developed by the researcher.
- Experimental research design** : This research design is used to establish effect cause-and- relationships between the independent and dependent variables by means of manipulation of variables, control and randomization. It involves the random allocation of participants to experimental and

control groups, manipulation of the independent variable, and the introduction of a control group for comparison purposes. Participants are assessed after the manipulation of the independent variable in order to assess its effect on the dependent variable (the outcome).

- Exploratory research design** : A study that is conducted to learn more about a phenomenon when not much is currently known; have general research questions to answer.
- Descriptive research design** : It is a study designed to study, describe and explain the phenomenon in a particular way. Using research methods like observation, case study or survey, it aims to describe people who take part in the study.

3.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Burns, R.B. (2000). *Introduction to Research Methods*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.\

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Dudley, James R. (2005). *Research methods for social work: Becoming consumers and producers of research*. New York: Pearson.