

RESEARCH METHODS - II



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COURSE INTRODUCTION

The importance of research in any discipline needs no elaboration. It is a specialized endeavor. It should be undertaken by those who are not only committed to but also trained in carrying out research studies. Towards this end, we have offered two courses; Sociological Research Methods I (BSOC 112) and Sociological Research Methods II (BSOC 114). In BSOC 112 we focused on what research is, critical issues and perspectives in sociological research, and use of ICT in research. The main objective of the present course is to develop an understanding of and equip you with techniques and methods of research. The course is divided into four blocks.

Block 1 titled **Doing Social Research** comprises three units. Unit 1 is on research design. This unit first explains what research is. Thereafter, it outlines what is research design and its significance. We identify different steps in preparation of research design. Unit 2 is on fieldwork. In this unit, we learn how researchers conduct fieldwork, how they are expected to approach people, establish rapport with them, and identify the key informants and gate keepers. Unit 3 familiarizes you with ethical issues and concerns that a researcher encounters in sociological research. It incorporates social responsibility of researchers towards the people under study.

Block 2 titled **Methods of Data Collection** comprises nine units: Unit 4 outlines the significance of sampling and types of sampling procedure. Further it explains how sampling is carried out in field situation. Unit 5 focuses on census and survey methods. It explains the significance of both census and survey, and sheds light on how one could make a choice between the two in a particular situation. Finally, it draws a comparison between census and survey. Unit 6 is based on the technique of observation. In this unit, we learn the difference between simply seeing or being a witness to a phenomenon and observing it. We will learn about different types of observation and how this technique can be used for data collection. Unit 7 provides an understanding of techniques of questionnaire, schedule, and interview. We learn how each of these is prepared, how these are used and their advantages and limitations. This will enable us to choose the technique and use it appropriately in fieldwork. Unit 8 focuses on two related methods of research: case study and life history. The need to study an individual or a phenomenon holistically and closely arises as for example in a study on private schools in a particular area. You might want to include say five schools in the study but focus on one of them in detail. Here, the case study method would be of use. Similarly you might inter take a study on potters. Here, it would be appropriate to understand the life of a potter or a few potters holistically i.e., including all aspects from childhood to present age. Of course, the emphasis could be on engagement with potters. In such a situation, life history method would be useful. Unit 9 is on ethnographic method. It tells us what ethnography is and how ethnographic method can be used to study a community. It explains the use of ethnographic method by referring to two important ethnographies: *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* and *Street Corner Society*.

Block 3 titled **Statistical Methods** comprises three units. Unit 10 deals with graphical and diagrammatic presentation of data. You would agree that graphs, diagrams and tables present data in a comprehensive and easy-to-understand way. We learn how data can be presented in visual form. Units 11 and 12 discuss important statistical methods of data analysis such as measures of central tendency and measures of dispersion.

Block 4 titled **Developing a Research Project** comprises two units. The objective here is to explain how a researcher could develop a research project. Unit 13 tells us about how we could select a topic for research, what issues should be considered in finalizing a research topic. Unit 14 describes how research proposal is prepared: What steps are followed and in what way a research proposal is presented.

Block 1

Doing Social Research



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UNIT 1 RESEARCH DESIGN*

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 What is Research?
- 1.3 Types of Research
- 1.4 What is Research Design?
- 1.5 Importance of Research Design
- 1.6 Elements of Research Design
 - 1.6.1 Statement of the Research Problem
 - 1.6.2 Review of Literature
 - 1.6.3 Objectives and Variables
 - 1.6.4 Sources of Data
 - 1.6.5 Universe of Study
 - 1.6.6 Techniques of Data Collection
 - 1.6.7 Analysis and Report Writing
- 1.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.8 References
- 1.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

1.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit you should be able to;

- identify different types of research;
- explain what research design is; and
- outline the significance of research design.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Research implies systematic study of a specific subject or topic. Social research, by and large, may be understood as a practice which intends to discover new facts or substantiate old facts logically and systematically. In other words, adding fresh knowledge, substantiating existing facts, or defying existing facts is the main purpose of social research. Young (2003) explains that, research aims to

* Written by M. Valarmathi, Independent Researcher, Coimbatore; Section 1.2 is adopted from Unit 12 of IGNOU course material: *Anthropology and Research Methods* (BANC 131)

develop new scientific tools, concepts, and theories which would facilitate reliable and valid study of human behaviour. Sociologists explore the subject of their research in a holistic framework. They incorporate all aspects that influence their topic of research. The objective is to obtain further knowledge about people, their society, and culture. By objectivity, we mean sociologists, as any other social scientists, ensure to keep their personal values and opinions aside in order to produce unbiased results. After choosing a topic for the study, sociologists seek to stay focused and not give room for any kind of influence. Such discipline and neutral behaviour forms the basis of objectivity in social science research.

This unit lays its emphasis on the nature and scope of social research. In the following section and sub-sections we will discuss types of research in social sciences. Subsequently, we will highlight the significance a research design and discuss how research design is prepared. In a nutshell, we will get a glimpse of what social research is; how it is planned; and how it is carried out. Other units in this course will deal with the process of research in detail.

1.2 WHAT IS RESEARCH?

Most of the anthropologists conduct their research by doing fieldwork, going to the field, which is wherever people and the cultures are, to study about their culture or any problem through direct observation.

Fieldwork

The practice in which an anthropologists collect first-hand information by systematic exploring society or culture. It involves living with study people, immersing themselves in the daily life of a culture, observing the behaviour of people and testing cultural hypotheses (Ferraro and Andretta, 2010).

Research can be interesting as it offers you a measure of control and autonomy over what you learn. It gives you an opportunity to confirm, clarify, pursue or even discover new aspects of a subject or topic you are interested in. Research can be conducted by anyone who is interested in exploring something.

Research is a process of enquiry and investigations; it is systematic, methodical and ethical; research can help solve practical problems and increase knowledge. Research involves several questions; for example,

- What is the research problem?
- Why does the problem occur?
- When does the problem occur?
- Where does the problem occur?
- How can the problem be solved?

Such types of questions rise from ‘curiosity’, which is one of the basic qualities of every human being. When such search or enquiry is made systematically, it becomes scientific research. Scientific research helps a researcher to develop a

new idea or a concept which ultimately results in a discovering new laws and theories or to improve or modify the existing ones.

Scholars have defined research in many ways. Few definitions of research are discussed below:

- Systematic effort to gain new knowledge: Redman and Morry (1933).
- Systematic, controlled, empirical and critical investigation of hypothetical relations among natural phenomena: Kerlinger (1986).
- Any organized inquiry designed and carried out to provide information for solving a problem: Emory (Caliwan, 2014).
- To see what everybody else has seen, and to think what nobody else has thought: Albert Szent-Gyorgyi (1937).
- A process of steps used to collect and analyze information to increase our understanding of a topic or issue: Creswell (2008).

The above definitions reveal the following characteristics of research, such as:

- A systematic and critical investigation to a phenomenon.
- It aims at interpreting and explaining a phenomenon.
- It adopts scientific method.
- It is based on empirical evidence and observable experience.
- It develops generalizations, principles or theories.
- It directed towards finding answer to the questions and solutions to the problems.

Every research has different purposes and objectives according to the subject of the study. In general the purpose of research is to discover answers to questions through the application of scientific procedures. The main aim of research is to find out the truth/fact which is hidden and which has not been discovered as yet.

While conducting research a researcher must have the skill and ability of how to conduct the research. He/she should select a good topic and according to the topic choose appropriate and specific tools and techniques. In research it is important to follow structural procedures and rules are known as methodology. To carry out scientific research you must follow proper methodology. Scientific research could be defined as an organised and systematic enquiry into a physical or social-cultural phenomenon to discover new or to verify the existing knowledge.

Essentials of Scientific Method

- It is empirical: Gives importance to direct observation and collection of data through field interaction.
- *It is systematic*: It relies on carefully planned studies rather than on random observation.

- *It is replicable:* Scientific experiments or studies are replicable as the repetition of experiments in similar conditions produce similar results everywhere.
- *It searches for cause:* It is based on the assumption that there exists cause and effect relationship of factors in every phenomenon.
- *Result is provisional:* Results of scientific method are open to question and debate and are subject to modification with new knowledge.
- *It is objective:* Scientific method yields unbiased facts rather than subjective beliefs and speculations.

Research in subject like physics and chemistry are carried out by doing experiments with different chemical reactions and physical elements. To solve their research problem they conduct experiments in laboratory.

In anthropology research is conducted on biological and socio-cultural dimensions. It is both laboratory and field-based.

- Biological anthropologists carry out their research in laboratory.
- Socio-cultural anthropologists carry out research by doing fieldwork; they are well known for their work among small-scale societies.

But today anthropologists are focusing their research on all kinds of human societies. The research is done in a systematic way by using scientific method. The term systematic implies the procedures adopted to undertake an investigation through a logical sequence.

Scientific method is a system used by researcher to generate data to understand a phenomenon, and to test hypothesis or to develop new theories or to confirm or reject old theories. It involves:

- formulation of a problem,
- preparation of research design,
- observation,
- collection of data,
- classification of data,
- analysis and interpretation of data.

Human beings, by nature, are not free from bias. So in research it is very important to understand the significance of objectivity and subjectivity, particularly in anthropological research.

- Subjectivity refers to the condition, in which the researcher's likes, dislikes, feelings, emotions and attitudes influence the study. The outcome of such research may not be totally valid and reliable.
- Objectivity is the unbiased condition of any scientific research. It is free from one's likes, dislikes, feelings, emotions and attitudes. Unless the study is objective, it cannot be considered scientific.

1.3 TYPES OF RESEARCH

There are different types of research in social sciences. Let us now discuss each one of them briefly.

Pure or Basic Research: Pure or basic research is carried out with the purpose of gaining knowledge for its own sake. Pure researchers come up with more of new ideas and concepts that could improve the old theories by incorporating new ideas into or lead to the emergence of new theories. In other words, innovation of new ideas that are fundamental in nature and also improvising the old theories encourages the pure scientists to enrich knowledge abundantly without expecting any direct result or impact or practical use of such theories in reality.

Applied Research: Applied research is based on the need to gather knowledge for practical application or use. Sociologists, for instance, concerned with this type of research could engage themselves with study of variety of social problems such as terrorism, trafficking of women, children and drugs, juvenile delinquency, marital conflicts, and property disputes among families. Unlike the pure research, applied research studies social problems and seek solutions. The purpose is to apply research findings to deal with social problems.

Exploratory Research: It is typically conducted in the interest of “getting to know” or increasing our understanding of a new or relatively less researched setting, group, or phenomenon. It is used to gain insight into a research topic. Consequently, exploratory research tends to utilize relatively small sample of subjects that permit the researcher to get first-hand information. To facilitate in-depth understanding, the researcher might engage in intensive one-on-one interviewing.

Experimental Research: When we want to find out the cause and effect of a particular problem experimental research would be the finest choice of researchers. It is appropriate to choose this kind of research especially to provide explanations for problem under given situation. Here, the researcher tries to prove that “A” causes “B” or “B” is the result of “A” alone. Experiments usually takes place or are carried out in created/established situations in the laboratory setting rather than in natural/real situations. Such experiments are done by manipulating the independent variable under pre-set conditions.

Descriptive Research: This type of research describes a social situation, an event of social structure. Here, researchers report what they find or what they see as accurately as possible. Consider the example of descriptive study of a market. Researchers are expected to describe what they see and what they find after interviewing some people.

Analytical Research: In this type of research, the researcher goes beyond the event which he/she sees. This is done by understanding the context of the event or social situation he she is studying. The assumption is that there is something more to what is being seen. Often, the researcher looks for the context, reasons and for implications of the event or social situation.

Evaluative Research: Evaluative research seeks to judge the merits or efficacy of a social programme or policy. Evaluative research is interested in “outcomes” or results of some specific program or policy. The significant basic elements in evaluative research include the nature and extent of effectiveness of the programme, its efficiency (in terms of cost benefits) which determines whether the programme should be continued. It is generally concerned with socio-economic development programs and its overall performance and impact. A researcher should always keep the ethics and values involved in the program and its associates at the forefront while evaluating a program.

Participatory Action Research: In this type of research, the members of a community are involved in the process of research. In participatory research, the purpose is to bring about a change in the lives of the community that the researchers studies. Naturally then, it is appropriate to involve members from the community itself. It implies joint effort or close collaboration between researcher and local people.

Check Your Progress 1

1) What do you understand by research?

.....

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.....

.....

2) Match the following types of research:

(i) Pure

(A) Carried out gaining knowledge for practical use.

(ii) Applied

(B) Carried out for gaining insight into an issue which is relatively less researched.

(iii) Exploratory

(C) Carried out for gaining knowledge to enrich existing theories and insights.

1.4 WHAT IS RESEARCH DESIGN?

A research design is a tentative plan of the study worked out by the social researcher at the beginning of the study. It is interesting to know/learn on how to prepare/equip one before getting into real plan of action. It is essential for any social researcher to devise a strategy to carry out the study. Such a strategy or plan of study consists of making certain decisions e.g., which issue should be studied, the geographical area or location of the study to be carried out, size of the population to be studied, periods of time, what are the techniques to be used in collecting data, digitization of the data, and analysis of the study. All these concerns help the researcher to check on the feasibility of the study at the beginning stage. It is as important as an architect who decides to construct a building with a clearly drawn map or the so called blue-print of the structure.

Such a design helps the social researcher to avoid various possible risks involved or helps him/her to anticipate the upcoming possible danger.

Research design is the strategic plan for a research project or program. It sets out the broad outline and key features of the work to be undertaken, including the methods of data collection and analysis to be employed, and showing how the research strategy addresses the specific aims and objectives of the study. The following questions constitute the major decisions taken by the researcher in designing the study: they are

- a) What the study is about?
- b) What kinds of data are needed for the study?
- c) Why the study is being made at all?
- d) Where the data needed can be found?
- e) Where or in what area the study will be carried out?
- f) What periods of time the study will include?
- g) How much of material or how many cases will be needed?
- h) What bases will be used for selection of cases?
- i) What techniques of gathering data will be adopted?
- j) How will the data be analysed?
- k) How best can these above questions be decided upon and decisions articulated in a manner that the research purpose will be achieved with minimum expenditure of money, time and energy?

A research design guides the study but it is not rigid or uniform for all researchers studying a particular subject. It is likely that two people studying the same subject will develop different research designs.

Among the others, the following few but major interdependent components such as rationale of the study, sources of data, framing the research objectives and hypothesis (if any), selecting the sample, and techniques of data collection constitute a research design.

1.5 IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design enables the social researcher to complete the scientific study systematically. For any activity to be complete, and successful, proper planning on how to carry out the particular work or how to execute the work is very important. A cook, for instance, needs to work out a detailed plan of action and construct flawless ideas about what to cook, for whom to cook, and why to cook before he/she actually begin to cook for the day. The cook needs to purchase in advance the goods as per requirements (in terms of quantity as well as quality) of the food items/menu to be prepared. For which, he/she needs to decide what to cook and how much to cook for the occasion. This would help the cook to purchase the necessary ingredients well in advance and start the cook process.

Similarly, a researcher needs to plan and then execute the activities of the study one by one. Such planning helps the researcher to foresee possible difficulties and challenges that may arise as the study progresses. A researcher is in a position to make many decisions with regard to the particular project well before the actual work may begin.

Based on the need and the nature of the study, a researcher can work out the appropriate research design. There is no single exclusive research design that can be used or followed for all types of studies. Research design could be any of the following types: descriptive, exploratory, experimental, survey or evaluative. A research design or plan is indispensable as it helps us in the following: (i) It helps the researchers to arrange and review their ideas in such a way that in future they can verify it (if there is any defect). (ii) Research design acts as a ready reckoner of the do's and the don'ts. (iii) It gives an idea of the content required in the initial phase. (iv) It serves as a document for intellectuals to comment and contribute (Kothari, 2008).

Like an architect constructing a house using the blueprint or map of the house developed by him/her, a researcher is required to plan wisely and lay down the procedures (includes, methods of data collection, techniques used for analysis of data) associated with the research project well in advance. Errors made at the time of planning a study may damage the results of the research at the end. In other words, a major error in research design shakes the very reliability of the results and fails to serve the purpose. Henceforth, keeping in view of these risks in mind, a researcher must understand the significance and need for a well-prepared research design before initiating any research project.

1.6 ELEMENTS OF RESEARCH DESIGN

Broadly speaking, the structure and process associated with research in social sciences may be classified into seven major guideposts. They are: identifying a topic for the study; reviewing the previous studies relevant for the topic chosen; framing objectives and construction of hypotheses; selection of appropriate design (in terms of research methods and techniques, including sampling procedure) of research; pre-testing the tools of the study (such as questionnaire and interview schedule, among others) and this step is followed by the collection of data at different phases; determining the sources of data; analysis of data using statistical techniques; finally, organising the findings and writing the report for publication. These steps are believed to serve guiding principles as for researcher. Now let us discuss each of these steps in detail for better understanding.

1.6.1 Statement of the Research Problem

The foremost step in a research is identifying/selecting a topic for the study. The topic should inevitably be a researchable one, which means the topic should be familiar and feasible for research by the researcher. Any researcher will have his/her own limitations, in terms of time, funds, geographical reach and access to data. Sociology offers scope for a wide range of research topics. But the researcher should choose the topic carefully taking into account these limitations.

Some topics might turn out to be complex and the researcher might face difficulty after he/she commences research.

A research topic could be born out of curiosity on the subject of the researcher; the significance of the outcome of research, its contribution to the society as well as sociological literature; extension of funds for a particular topic; or contemporary relevance of the topic.

Equally important is stating the research problem. The research topic should be clearly defined. The researcher requires identifying a specific research topic from a general social problem.

The researcher needs to state the research problem clearly and provide the social context in which it acquires relevance. Many researchers are confused when they are asked to state their research problem. All they have to do is to outline what they want to study and provide the context. This context could be historical, social, political or economic. Often, it is a combination of all these. Let us consider the example of a researcher who seeks to study the problem of drug abuse. It is not enough to state that he/she will study drug abuse. What is required is a clear description of the context in which this subject will be studied. If it is to be social context, the study would focus on social conditions that lead to drug abuse. Similarly, if it is to be political context, it will focus on the politics, governance and political conditions relevant to drug abuse. In this sense, context in which the study will be carried out provides direction to the study.

Researcher should make a well-thought out decision for choosing the particular research topic. There should be a sound justification for carrying out the study. The study should aim to answer hitherto unanswered questions, should bring out new facts and throw light on unexplored areas. The intended research should add value to existing literature in the subject. In short, the research should serve a purpose. For instance, a researcher studying women empowerment in disaster-struck areas may justify by stating that the study intends to identify means by which the women got their lives back on track.

1.6.2 Review of Literature

Once a research topic is chosen, it is important to know the studies done by other researchers in the past in the same topic. This familiarization will help the researcher to gather more information about his/her subject as well as to avoid duplication of a study. Reviewing relevant literature may help the researcher to formulate his/her objectives, sharpen his/her focus, distinguish the current study from the earlier ones and fine tune the research to supplement or sometimes dispute earlier studies. Review of literature will also throw open more and fresh ideas facilitating better research. Earlier studies might also function as a guide for the current study, in terms of tools, techniques and theories to be used. So based on the nature of the subject, previous studies might help the researcher in adopting appropriate techniques used for similar research. The problem which many researchers encounter in review of literature is that they find far too many books and articles relating with their subject. It is not possible to include all the

books and articles into a single study. What is the way out? The way out is to make a careful and wise selection of books and articles. It is helpful to refer to the objectives of the study in making the selection.

The researcher should also bear in mind that review of literature is a constant process throughout the research and not necessarily a single step to be carried out in the initial stage. The purpose of the review of literature is to identify the gaps or deficiencies in existing body of knowledge. These gaps or deficiencies could be filled up in the study of the researcher.

1.6.3 Objectives and Variables

Reviewing available literature on a particular subject would throw several unanswered questions on the subject before the researcher. Previous researches might have been carried out focusing on a different dimension of the subject resulting in such unanswered questions.

The answers for these questions would help fill the void in the research topic and help researcher arrive at a fresh finding. The task before the researcher stage is to formulate the objectives of the study. Basically, objectives provide us the reins to guide the study.

After the objectives are outlined, the researcher identifies the specific attributes of the study. For example, if one is studying empowerment of women in a community, the variables of the study could be education and income. There could be many more variables. When we say education and income are variables in a study of empowerment of women, we seek to find the way the empowerment of women depend on their education and income.

‘Hypothesis’ is a tentative statement framed by the researcher based on his assumption of possible link between two variables. It is generated soon after the reviewing of literature and framing of objectives. A hypothesis represents a relationship between variables. It is based on observation of the researcher, existing literature and data. For instance, a researcher investigating role of self help groups (SHGs) in empowering coastal women, could frame his/her hypothesis stating that women engaged with SHGs have greater say in decision making in their household as well as in the village. The researcher would then venture to test this assertion with empirical data collected during the research. The empirical data may be such that the hypothesis is rejected.

1.6.4 Sources of Data

Let us understand what data is. For most researchers data are relevant facts, figures, information, events and experiences that serve as the basis of the study. Data could relate with the past (i.e. what has happened earlier) and/or with the present. A question arises at this stage: Where does a researcher find data?

The study could be based on primary data or secondary data. Primary data refers to what the researcher gathers afresh from the field. On the other hand, secondary data are obtained from published books and journals, previous research works,

government documents, reports, records, visual and audio tapes and other available material.

Individuals or group of individuals chosen for the study are the sources of primary data. Individuals who provide data are referred to as informants. So, informants are not data. They are the sources of data for the researcher. Data is what they tell us either through words or through actions.

1.6.5 Universe of Study

Once the context is determined the next step is to identify the locale of the study. The locale is meant the geographical area or place in which the study will be carried out-within a particular geographical area, the researcher identifies the population or community he/she would study. This is called the universe of study. The universe of study need not be physical space or location in which the research is carried out. It could be a social group among which the study is carried out.

Selecting few people as informants from the whole population for the study purpose is one of the strenuous tasks in research. The population constitutes/denotes not only of people but also place, organization, households, people's behavior, attributes and perceptions, among others. Considering the constraints of factors such as time, energy and available resources, a researcher could be required to select few informants for the purpose of data collection. This constitutes the sample only few among large numbers.

1.6.6 Techniques of Data Collection

The next stage in preparing a research design is the collection of data. Secondary data could be obtained from libraries and other resources. Primary data is collected through fieldwork or survey. Collection of data through fieldwork can be making use of many techniques, observations, interview, case study etc. We will learn about these in following units. Collection of data through survey is usually done by using questionnaires. Data collected by sociologists could be quantitative or qualitative in nature. Qualitative data is numeric i.e. it can be counted in numbers e.g. number of members in a family who are below 18 years of age. This kind of data is collected through census method. We will learn about census method in Unit 5.

Qualitative data is descriptive in nature. It cannot be counted in terms of numbers e.g. data concerning beliefs and values. This kind of data is collected through observation, interviews, case study method. Some questions in a questionnaire could be framed for qualitative data.

Many sociologists collect both quantitative and qualitative data for their research. In other words, research on a particular topic could use both quantitative and qualitative data. A researcher can use one or more techniques of research depending on the objectives and scopes of the study, financial resources and time available for the study.

1.6.7 Analysis and Report Writing

Analysis of the collected data is crucial step of the research. It is during this process that raw data, which is just a set of numbers or statements, is converted into meaningful inferences. Statistical data needs to be coded, tabulated based on the objectives, structured in a linear order and then examined. Examination of the data would reveal information with which we can test our hypotheses. As a result, researcher may verify the relevance of the findings with existing studies. The investigator can analyze the data using statistical techniques such as SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

Complex and complicated data can be classified into simple categories and tables for easy analysis. Coding of the data is the first procedure during analysis. Here the entire set of data like age, education, income, gender, family type of all the respondents are given codes or symbols such as a, b, c, d. The researcher can edit the data to improve the quality of coding.

The collected data is then entered in the form of these codes and symbols. The data thus entered is then counted for drawing up tables to make inferences.

For coding, editing and tabulation, the researcher can make use of modern technology like computers and software. In the pre- computer era, researchers used chart for coding and tabulation. But the current generation of researchers is blessed with technology which saves time and energy. Latest software also helps researchers in deducing large quantum of data with a number of variables easily.

Numbers from the tables are then converted into percentages which give a better understanding of the data. The table driven data helps in drawing pictorial representation (flow chart, pie chart, bar diagram, histogram).

Data obtained through the techniques of mainly observation, interviews need to be analysed in a theoretical framework. Consider the example of a study on a gender. The data could be analysed in a Marxist, feminist or some other framework. The researcher makes a decision to select a theoretical framework which would guide the analysis. Also it is important to juxtapose quantitative data with qualitative data. In other words, if a researcher has collected figures and carried out his/her analysis, it should be related with qualitative data. In many studies researchers rely on qualitative data. In that case only theoretical framework is used for analysis. After analysis, the researcher needs to spell out the manner in which he/she will present the results of the study. Findings could be presented as a research report, a book or research article.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) List three techniques of data collection used in fieldwork.

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- 2) Distinguish between primary data and secondary data.

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1.7 LET US SUM UP

We began this unit with a brief description of the nature and scope of research in social sciences. Then we have elaborated to you some of the major types of research in social sciences, such as pure research, applied research, exploratory research, experimental research, and evaluative research.

Lastly, we discussed how to prepare a research design for your own project assignment. We focussed on the statement of the problem, rationale of the study and review of relevant literature. Further, we mentioned about objectives and formulation of hypotheses of the study as also sources and analysis of data.

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1.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Research is a systematic and objectively carried out study of a particular subject.
- 2) i) (C) ii) (A) iii) (B)

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Three techniques of data collection used in field work are:
- (i) Observation (ii) Interview (iii) Case Study

- 2) Primary data can be collected mainly through fieldwork by the researchers using some of the research tools such as interview, questionnaire, and schedule, among others. Secondary data comprises information obtained from books, journals, government records, reports, documents, newspapers, and other published materials.



UNIT 2 DOING FIELDWORK*

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Overview of Fieldwork
- 2.3 Entering the Field
- 2.4 Field Relations: Building Rapport and Trust
- 2.5 Learning the Art of Conversation
- 2.6 Recording Field Data
 - 2.6.1 Field-Notes
 - 2.6.2 Digital Recording
- 2.7 Ethical Concerns
- 2.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.9 References
- 2.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you should be able to discuss:

- key concerns in conducting ethnographic fieldwork;
- role and responsibility of the fieldworker towards the people under study; and
- ethical issues involved in the practice of fieldwork.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Fieldwork is considered to be the backbone of sociological research. In a fieldwork endeavour, the researcher goes away from one's own society and stays with the people under study for a sustained period, which has been regarded as a crucial and indispensable part of primary data collection. At present, ethnographic fieldwork is increasingly practised in highly contemporary settings, as well as the more old-fashioned 'remote' ones. Fieldwork can be practiced in a variety of different settings, ranging from a small group of nomadic community or a small village setting to an urban slum, a school or an academic institution, or

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an office launch of a corporate business entity. We often come across the sites of fieldwork, largely located in the village settings or among the small scale tribal communities in the forests or mountains. During the colonial period and before, European and American anthropologists followed the paths of missionaries and travellers and colonial officials to document the lives of people and cultures in the forests and islands of Africa, North America, Asia and the Australian Pacific.

Fieldwork is among the most significant and distinctive practices anthropologists bring to the study of human life and culture in its very ordinary and natural setting. Through fieldwork, the researcher is able to develop a comprehensive account of the context of everyday activities, perceptions, worldviews, and social relations in a given cultural milieu. Fieldwork in a traditional sense, in an unfamiliar setting has among its objectives an in-depth understanding that captures an 'insider's viewpoint' in all possible ways. In a more familiar setting of culture, the ethnographer is able to examine the taken-for-granted ordinary and banal aspects of life in a more nuanced ways and can be subjected to reflective analysis.

2.2 OVERVIEW OF FIELDWORK

In a nutshell we can say that an ethnographic fieldwork comprises of most of the following features. Primarily the actions and events in a particular cultural setting are studied in people's everyday contexts, rather than under conditions created by the researcher such as in an experimental setup or in a well structured studio recorded and pre-scripted interview. In other words, life is captured as it happens in the field, the natural setting of human action. Data will be collected from a variety of sources ranging from informal conversations and interactions to focus group discussions, and from participant observation and interview, to historic materials, cultural artifacts and other forms of documentary evidences. The mode of data collection in a qualitative fieldwork setting is relatively 'unstructured' and the researcher's skill to adapt to the situation and improvise with tactics becomes crucial. The focus in a fieldwork will be on micro-aspects through in-depth case analysis rather than entering into macro-level generalizations. Interpretation of the meanings, functions and consequences of human action and institutional practices is central to the treatment of data within a given cultural context.

The orientation of the researcher brings the question of being reflexive in the course of the fieldwork and during the time of report writing. The role that he or she plays as a researcher is not assumed to be objective in any absolute sense and it will be shaped by their socio-historic locations. In that sense, we need to reject the idea that field research in social sciences is or can be conducted in a totally autonomous realm that is insulated from the wider society or free from the biography of the researcher. As Hamersley and Atkinson rightly suggest "There is no doubt that reflexivity, in the sense just outlined, is a significant feature of social research. Indeed, there is a sense in which all social research takes the form of participant observation: it involves participating in the social world, in

whatever role, and reflecting on the products of that participation” (Hamersley and Atkinson 2006: 15).

As has been mentioned, there are a variety of strategies and roles the fieldworker may espouse in the course of the fieldwork, with a range of advantages and disadvantages, possibilities and dangers engrained in them. Researchers, who steadily modify and improvise their field roles, can effectively collect diverse types of data whose assessment in turn, can critically enrich interpretation and analysis. However, researchers cannot entirely command over their field roles as establishing and maintaining field relations can simultaneously be a strenuous as well as an exciting experience. Leaving the field may also involve some difficulties for some researchers due to emotional and affective relations to people and place that they develop during their fieldwork. In addition, fieldworkers must acquire the skill to cope with their own feelings and come to terms with their prejudices and biases in order to complete a meaningful and sensible process of doing fieldwork.

In the era of digital technology, the notion of field itself has been expanded to a wide-ranging spectrum of locations, what we now call the ‘virtual’ field, which is qualitatively distinct from the traditional notions about the field setting, such as a village, small town or a city. Virtual fields and virtual fieldwork are now made possible, and are gaining currency in a new world order, which is both global and digital. The emergence of various forms of virtual communities and networks poses particular challenges and possibilities for conducting fieldwork (Appadurai 1997). Similarly, ethnographies of digital life itself are considered to be significant areas of social research in contemporary times. Moreover, there are many possible avenues to exploit the potentials of digital technologies in order to make sense of the changing patterns of social life.

2.3 ENTERING THE FIELD

Fieldwork can occur in distinct settings and can be organised in different forms, depending on several important factors such as the topic of investigation, the kind of social group under study, the geographical and cultural characteristics of the place of fieldwork, the funding bodies, political or economic factors, the gender, age, language, and ethnicity of the ethnographer, the technological facilities available and so on.

Gaining access to the field is a preliminary and important task for the researcher if she or he is an outsider to the social and cultural group under study. The researcher needs to gather the trust of the people among whom he or she is going to conduct the fieldwork. Access may need to be secured through gatekeepers, who are normally the custodians of a particular cultural group or a locality. However, access will also have to be negotiated and renegotiated with the people being studied on a regular basis. This is to ensure that the researcher’s presence does not become hindrance to the normal course of action in the field. This is necessary even where ethnographers are studying cultural settings in which they are already participants.

Access is not simply a matter of physical presence or absence of a researcher as in the role of a cultural outsider. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) suggest that it is far more than the granting or withholding of permission for research to be conducted. In the case of a social group, which has clear geographical or cultural boundaries maintained by its occupants; or in the case of an administrative setting like an educational institution, a corporate company, a bank or a police academy, then the researcher needs to gain formal access through a sanction by the gatekeepers in that given field. There is an assumption that issues related to access could be avoided if one were to do fieldwork in a 'public' setting only, such as streets, super markets, shopping malls, bus, train or other public transport vehicles, and similar places. This is true in one sense as in principle anyone can enter such public arenas. No processes of taking permission or other negotiations are required for these public domains. However, sometimes the physical presence is not in itself problematic, but appropriate activity may become an issue for some of the participants.

In the so called 'formal', 'private' settings it may not be easy to approach people for data collection. Apart from obtaining permission from those who control activities of the organization.

2.4 FIELD RELATIONS: BUILDING RAPPORT AND TRUST

Building rapport with the participants and gaining their trust are the most important aspects of fieldwork once the researcher enters the field. Rapport refers to the relationship which a researcher establishes with informants. This relationship is characterized by trust and understanding which facilitates communication between researcher and informants. In formal organizations, initial negotiations for access may be focused on official permission that can rightfully be granted or withheld by key personnel. In most occasions, such gatekeepers are often the ethnographer's initial point of contact with those research settings. This stage of fieldwork requires humility and patience with a sensitive approach in conversation with the key personnel who are going to be the point of reference in the course of fieldwork. It is important to secure certain ideas about symbols and gestures in personal interaction and conversation in the given culture/community. The fieldworker's own cultural traits and mannerisms sometimes become offensive or cultural taboo in a different cultural setting. This problem needs to be carefully addressed while entering a distinct cultural setting for doing fieldwork. Fieldworker's skill to adapt to the situation becomes crucial in such contexts.

Learning the local language in quick time, reading the symbolic and gestural characteristics of communication, adjusting to the local food culture, interacting with the people as cultural equals (without exercising any sense of cultural superiority), and equally interacting with all age group are qualities of a skilful fieldworker who will be able to build good rapport in effective manner.

Box 2.1 Gatekeepers and Sponsors

In order to gain a smooth entry and access to the field, the researcher needs to identify the key informants and gatekeepers of that particular field setting. Identifying the relevant gatekeepers is neither easy nor straightforward in all occasions, and the distinction between sponsors and gatekeepers is often found ambiguous. In urban contexts, especially with reference to formal bureaucratic organizations, it is not always clear whose permission needs to be obtained, or which office it might be advisable to secure approval. A similar situation can occur in studying local communities. In the fieldwork setting, the cooperation and acquaintance of gatekeepers or sponsors will shape the conduct and development of the research. The researcher's trajectory will be by and large determined and channelled in line with existing networks of friendship and tensions among different kinds of people with whom he or she interact in the field. There are constraints and boundaries fixed with the negotiations and decisions made by the sponsor or gatekeeper in the course of fieldwork. In the case of researchers, having been 'taken up' by a sponsor, Hammersley and Atkinson note, "the ethnographer may find it difficult to achieve independence from such a person, discovering that his or her research is bounded by the social horizon of a sponsoring group or individual. Such social and personal commitments can, like gatekeepers' blocking tactics, close off certain avenues of inquiry. The fieldworker may well find him-or herself involved in varieties of 'patron-client' relationship with sponsors, and in so doing discover influence exerted in quite unforeseen ways (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 59).

As has been mentioned earlier, the problem of access is not resolved once one has gained entry to a cultural setting as mere entry by no means guarantees access to every source of relevant data or all people who are potential respondents in different ways. Every part of the field area will not be equally available for the researcher to explore for observation, and every individual may not be willing to freely interact with the researcher. Sometimes, the most enthusiastic informant will not be equipped, or perhaps even able, to pass all the information she or he possesses. Negotiation of access along with proper rapport building are therefore a recurrent preoccupation for the ethnographer if the data required are to be gathered (O'reilly, 2005).

The ethnographer's entry to the given cultural setting has to be absolutely free from disturbing the normal life of the participants in that setting in any manner and her or his activities of data collection shall not invite any threats and consequences to the life of people once the fieldwork is complete. The participants need to gather confidence and be convinced on both these counts while the researcher is conducting fieldwork. Building rapport and gaining trust depend on the confidence that the researcher can instill in the minds of the participants through his/her ways of interaction and conversation.

2.5 LEARNING THE ART OF CONVERSATION

Once the researcher enters the field after gaining access and building rapport among the people, the second stage of the fieldwork involves three key activities: (i) watching what is happening the act of observation, (ii) asking questions and listening to what is said – conversation and interview, and (iii) recording the ‘what is seen and heard’ in the field. Within these three activities, there are several methods and techniques adapted by ethnographers according to different situations. This unit will not engage with all such techniques and methods, rather than it focuses on some basic ideas and strategies that a researcher needs to equip with.

It will be difficult for the researcher to identify clearly in the beginning of the fieldwork where, within a setting, observation should be begin, which actors need to be followed, and so on. The researcher has to prepare and redesign the sampling techniques, as the research progresses. This revision of techniques will be applicable in the case of conducting interviews as well. Here, making decisions about whom to interview, what time to interview, and where to interview, are crucial and to be developed over time. Normally in ethnographic fieldwork, interviewing will be organized in a relatively unstructured form, though more structured or strategic questioning may be deployed towards the latter part of the fieldwork. Data will be collected predominantly in a qualitative manner with the help of field-notes, written in concretely descriptive terms and also through audio-or video-recordings, along with the collection of documents, cultural artefacts and dossiers. The different forms of information and materials will be subject to analytical scrutiny towards the production of a written document. In all these aspects, ethnography is considered to be a demanding activity, involving diverse skills, comprising the researcher’s ability to make decisions in varying conditions of comforts and uncertainty (Davies 2008).

In order to deploy different types of observation (participant and non-participant observation), the researcher has to secure the consent from the gatekeepers and other members in the group. While doing observation, the researcher’s presence in a culturally significant event (whether it is a ritual, festival or a ceremony) shall not disturb the flow of that event or activity. The activity or event has to occur in a natural setting irrespective of the presence of the researcher. In other words, it is the responsibility of the researcher as his or her presence shall not bring any major shift in the activity or event that is taking place.

It is challenging to maintain the natural setting of events, especially when the researcher is an outsider to the research setting. In such occasions, the researcher needs to prepare the ground for making observation through a sustained interaction with the people in the early phase of the fieldwork. This includes the skill of acquiring the right frame of conversation. If the researcher is able to normally communicate with the people, the purpose of his or her visit to the field site becomes effective. A comprehensive understanding about the research setting, i.e., thorough background knowledge about the culture/community,

would help the researcher to effectively communicate with the people in their own terms and references of life-world to a certain extent. Once the people inhabiting the research setting become aware of the purpose of the researcher and his or her presence does not cause any uneasiness to them, the researcher is able to cross the major hurdle in the whole exercise. However, the ground can be set for observation in a natural setting depends on the nature of conversation and interaction through which the researcher gathers the comfort of the people.

Researcher's attempts to learn the local language, cultural symbols and gestures, developing a taste for appreciating the local cuisine and taking part in the activities of the given cultural milieu as natural course of action are some of the footsteps that would provide a solid ground for him or her to be accepted by the participants in wholehearted ways. Once the researcher reaches this phase of acceptance by the people, then the process of observation – the act of watching closely what is happening; what people do in their everyday setting will become effective as well as a normal activity with little tension.

The acts of asking questions and seeking answers also realized to be performed in a non-mechanical fashion. Some researchers will rush to ask questions in order to collect data in an abrupt manner. Some others will lag the conversation to the maximum possible extent to extract all possible information from the respondent giving little value to his or her time. There is no midway or balancing act to address this issue in all situations. This is a context specific and individual centric problem. Some respondents will be in a hurry to answer and get back to their work. Some others will be willing to spend more time with the researcher. In some situations, the same respondents will behave with little consistency. These varied and unpredictable situations will make the site of conversation uneven and unstable. A thoughtful fieldworker will have to read the conversation setting in a careful manner. This includes the respondents' level of interest to engage with the topic under discussion, the time chosen for conversation, the attitude and behaviour of the respondent. His or her familiarity and attachment to the researcher, the nature of the topic(s) under discussion, the tone and gestures of the respondent, gender and age and so on. Interviews and conversations in that sense cannot be operated in a predetermined and in a rigidly scheduled manner in a fieldwork setting. The researcher needs to switch the style and content of conversation according to the demand of the situation. Improvisation becomes the key in such situations and the researcher needs to prepare for making sudden shifts in the modes of speaking and listening. Endlessly speaking and interrupting the respondent while speaking need to be tamed in order to balance the conversation setting. Patiently listening to the respondent is part of conducting a quality interview. Primarily, the more the researcher can adapt and respond to the situation, the communication and data collection will become more effective.

It is also important to seek the permission and make the respondent comfortable while recording the data in a conversation or interview setting. Recording techniques vary from the old-fashioned 'taking notes' to audio and video recording of the entire episode of conversation. On an ethical dimension of

affairs, it is always mandatory to seek the permission from the respondent on the mode of recording the content of conversation.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Outline Malinowski's contribution to fieldwork.

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- 2) In what way can a researcher build rapport among people he/she sets out to study?

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2.6 RECORDING FIELD DATA

Recording the information gathered from the field is an ongoing and crucial enterprise in ethnographic field work in order to facilitate analysis. Field-notes are the conventional means in fieldwork for recording observational, conversational and interview data. In a traditional sense, field-notes were handwritten, but now they can sometimes be stored directly into audio-visual devices or laptop. The decision to work with field-notes in different situations whether they can be written at all, and how, in what occasions, and covering what issues depends on the nature of the research, the varied circumstances in which fieldwork occurs, and the roles and issues in which the researcher is engaged with.

However, it is well evident that there is an impossibility to render explicit all the data acquired during fieldwork. But the researchers try to put all efforts to record it. Since one cannot remember what informants tell the researcher, the fieldworker has to find appropriate ways to record the activities and encounters in the field to the maximum extent possible. What is collected or recorded, and the methods, will depend on the purposes and priorities of the research, and the conditions in which it is taken place. Moreover, while deploying various recording techniques, the researchers must remain aware of the impacts and consequences their use may be having, both on participants and on the analysis of data. In the backdrop of such effects, the researcher must be prepared to modify the strategies of his or her activities in the field.

2.6.1 Field-Notes

The writing of field-notes often constitutes a central research activity in a fieldwork setting. Field-notes need to be prepared with as much care and self-conscious awareness from the part of the researcher. As Wolfinger aptly notes field-notes are always selective and it is not possible to capture everything

happening in a field setting. And there happens a trade-off between breadth of focus and detail. The information and images recorded will depend on one's general sense of what is relevant to the proposed research problems, as well as on background expectations (Wolfinger, 2002). Moreover, the character of field-notes may well change, in terms of focus and detail as the research progresses.

The preparation of field-notes demands care and attention as satisfactory note-taking needs to be worked at. It amounts to a significant and skill demanding repeated assessment of purposes and priorities in the context of the given research problem, and of the costs and benefits of different strategies. The appropriate positioning of the researcher in the acts of 'write down what you see and hear', becomes crucial in connection with a number of important issues. The fieldworker will have to filter among a number of things, to ask *what* to write down, *how* to write it down, and *when* to write it down. This leads to a concern over the form and content of field-notes. As it is well evident, one can never record everything happening in the field since social scenes are truly vast and inexhaustible. The researcher then, has to make some selections about what to record and what not to, given the nature and focus of research.

For writing field-notes in a traditional way, at least three methods can be deployed; they are: copying by hand, indexing, and summarizing. However, these three modes of note-taking are not mutually exclusive, and each should be used according to the anticipated use and the future and foreseeing the importance of the subject matter. It is also important to take caution about certain practical problems that one often encounters in fieldwork situations. A preliminary and crucial concern is about the timing of preparing field-notes; or to put it precisely 'when to write notes? Most experienced fieldworkers would suggest that, in principle, one should attempt to make notes as soon as possible after the observed event or action. This is to capture the event or action in totality as the quality of their notes along with memory diminishes rapidly with the passage of time, and the depth of the data will be lost.

The ideal would be to record things when the researcher makes participant observation. But this is not always possible, and even when it *is* possible the opportunities may be very limited due to the respondents' attention, which will be on the act of recording in the thick of action. Sometimes the interviewer's attention will be lost in the act of recording what has been said rather than thinking about it. Nevertheless, combining interviewing and note-taking is a skill that can be learned with practice.

Some scholars opine that field-notes fail to provide a comprehensive record of the research setting. The written record will get disconnected from its actual context when the researcher revisits them in a different occasion. . In such situation it is important for the researchers to rely on 'head notes' or memory to fill in and re-contextualize recorded events and utterances. One's fieldwork should not be totally depended on the field-notes, as if they were the sum total of available information. In that sense, there needs to be an alternative storage of

things in a supplementary form of data back-up in case the field-notes fail to comprehend much, while analyzing the data.

2.6.2 Digital Recording

In recent years, the advent of digital audio-recorders and cameras, and the increased capacity of computers to handle pictures and sound as well as text, has opened up new possibilities. Since the technology of permanent recording is now readily available, in small and reliable formats, there are several potentials for better quality data in key respects. The uses of video or film, still photography, and audio-recording offer various options for data collection and storage. However, their usage may sometimes bring unwelcome disadvantages, and can lead the course of fieldwork in ways that are undesirable. No means of data recording should be simply adopted in a mechanical fashion in the absence of a reflexive awareness. At the same time, choices have to be made about whether audio-visual data and the analytical possibilities that they offer are suitable for the purposes of a particular research context. It is also important to know whether use of the digital recording devices concerned is feasible in the field being investigated.

There is a common notion that photography, film, and video-recording can always producing, faithful, realistic images of the world. Sensitive researchers must be aware of the fact that these forms of representation are always partial and the output depends completely on the ways in which they are used, modified and manipulated by human agents. Researchers, according to the requirement of one's own research in concern with ethical issues, must take caution about: 1. From where pictures and videos are to be taken, 2. Whether the camera should be fixed or moving, 3. whether a single focus is to be adopted or whether the focus should vary; and if so when and how, 4. How to make the natural setting of research in tact to the maximum possible extent, while using the audio-visual devices of recording. Continuous usage of the camera or an audio device of recording will make constraints for simultaneous note-making. It is advisable to write field-notes even if the researcher is fully equipped with electronic devices of recording throughout the fieldwork. Electronic and digital devices can suffer from technical failure in certain occasions. In such situations, the researcher will lose the entire data. A supplement of field-notes can save the storage of data in such occasions. However, there is no single, absolute and correct way to record and store information or to retrieve it for analysis. The various systems of data recording and storage, including currently available devices and formats differ in fittingness according to one's purposes, requirements, in line with the nature of the data collected. The use of such devices also depends on the knowledge and skill of the researcher to handle them as well as his or her personal convenience. In that sense, the operations of recording, storing, and retrieving data must be viewed as part of the reflexive process handled uniquely by individual researchers. Making decisions and constantly monitoring and remaking them in the light of methodological, practical and ethical grounds are crucial and significant aspects of recording data among other activities in the field.

On some occasions, the respondents will exercise power over the researcher as they may be, or consider themselves to be, very sophisticated in their knowledge of research methodology or in some occasions they may have a negative attitude towards research (Anderson 2002). This problem of resistance may be acute in the case of people being studied are academics and most interestingly, sometimes social scientists themselves (Platt 1981).

2.7 ETHICAL CONCERNS

The issues related to ethics are crucial as far as the researcher is concerned, in any field of inquiry. Here we will discuss the ethical concerns pertaining to ethnography and in the domain of fieldwork. These issues can be discussed under five broad categories. Such as informed consent, privacy, harm, exploitation, and consequences for future research (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007).

One of the most important issues is related to the question of consent. Informed consent is widely discussed in the domain of social research especially when human agents constitute the target group of research. It is necessary to inform the participants about the purpose of research and to gain access to the field site through informed consent. Sometimes in ethnographic fieldwork, only a few people (gatekeepers and prominent members) in a large cultural group will be aware of the researcher's involvement in their community. In such situations, the researcher will not be able to gather information from most people in a community as some people will not be interested in sharing the information with the researcher.

This issue often arises with the notion of privacy as ethnographic research may involve making things public which were said or done in private. This may be realized as breaching a matter of principle, but sometimes it is also feared that making the private into public may have undesirable long-term consequences. Barnes has suggested that most social research 'entails the possibility of destroying the privacy and autonomy of the individual' as the researchers, with their curiosity to gather information, try to enter the domain of the private (Barnes 1979).

Ethnographers need to take the responsibility of causing any damage to the lives of the people under study. Harm can occur in certain situations of experimental research involving medical experiments on patients or nuclear testing in a particular area, which can bring damaging consequences to the lives of people. The problems may arise as a result of either the actual process of doing the research or through publication of the findings, or sometimes in both ways

Harm may also arise from the nature of the field relations that are established in the course of ethnographic fieldwork. When ethnographers seek to build rapport and trust, there are chances of getting close to certain participants. However, usually these effects may well lessen or disappear once the fieldwork gets over. But in certain situations, there are dangers that can arise from effectively establishing close and emotional relations with people in the field, for the researcher, for them, or for both.

Sometimes it is claimed that research involves the exploitation of people under study, by the nature of research. It is desirable in such circumstances not to deliberately engaging any such exploitative processes, financial or otherwise, even if the researcher make little effort to empower the people under study. Problems of ethical insensibilities and exploitation of the people under study can invite severe consequences for future research. Once faced with a negative experience from a researcher, then the participants can block the road to that particular field setting for the future researchers as well. You will learn about ethical issues concerning research in Unit 3.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) What are the two main methods for recording field data?

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- 2) List three important ethical concerns in fieldwork.

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2.8 LET US SUM UP

Fieldwork is the chief means of collecting primary data. In this unit we gained insights into how to conduct fieldwork. We began with learning what a researcher should do when he/she begins fieldwork. How he/she can establish a relationship with the local people. Thereafter, we discussed how the researcher should converse with informants and how the data that he/she collects should be recorded. Finally we discussed ethical issues that need to be taken care of.

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2.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Malinowski argued for the necessity of fieldwork, instead of studying cultures from the comfort of university libraries and archives. For him, going to the field, that is, living with the people, staying with them, engaging in their community activities, learning their language, and taking part in their everyday life, becomes crucial for the in-depth study of cultures. Malinowski's historic fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands for a period of four years (longest time of fieldwork) became a benchmark in anthropology.

- 2) The researcher can develop rapport with the people he/she sets out to study in following ways:

Learning the local language in quick time, reading the symbolic and gestural characteristics of communication, adjusting to the local food culture, interacting with the people as cultural equals (without exercising any sense of cultural superiority), and equally interacting with all age group are qualities of a skilful fieldworker who will be able to build good rapport in effective manner.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Two methods of recording field-data are:
 - i) Field-notes, and
 - ii) Digital recording

2) Important ethical concern in fieldwork are:

- i) Obtaining Informed consent
- ii) Safeguarding Privacy of informants
- iii) Ensuring met no harm is caused people under study



UNIT 3 ETHICS IN SOCIAL RESEARCH*

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Importance of Ethics in Social Research
- 3.3 Ethical Code of Conduct
 - 3.3.1 American Sociological Association
- 3.4 Issue of Objectivity
- 3.5 Ethical Considerations in Social Research
 - 3.5.1 Informed Consent
 - 3.5.2 Vulnerability of Research Participants
 - 3.5.3 Anonymity and Confidentiality
 - 3.5.4 Conflict of Interest
 - 3.5.5 Integrity and Transparency
- 3.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.7 References
- 3.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

3.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you should be able to discuss the

- importance of ethics in social research;
- issue of objectivity and value neutrality; and
- ethical concerns that emerge during social research.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

It refers to the set of values, standards, and principles that serve as benchmark to determine appropriate and acceptable conduct at all stages of the research process. It includes both prohibitions and prescriptions for behaviour in research. We begin this Unit with the importance of ethics in social research. We will describe the ethical code of conduct laid down by the American Sociological Association. Then we will discuss the issue of objectivity in social research. Finally, we will outline the main ethical consideration in social research.

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3.2 IMPORTANCE OF ETHICS IN SOCIAL RESEARCH

Social Science research has long been concerned with ethical issues. Most sociological research uses *people* as source of information. They may either be respondents to survey questions, subjects of observation, or participants in experiments. Unlike researchers in disciplines of physics or chemistry (who deal with non-living, inert matter), sociologists deal with human beings. It is for this reason that sociologists need to be sensitive to the people they study. It thus requires unique sensitivity and awareness to prevent any misuse and harm to people within the ambit of research study. Ethical considerations of sociologists lie not only in the methods they use and the funding they accept but in the way they interpret their results. Hence, ethics should be incorporated in all stages of a research.

Integrating ethics into the entire research process, from selecting the research problem to carrying out research goals and interpretation and reporting research findings, is critical to ensure that the research process is guided by ethical principles beyond informed consent. At all times, researchers should be aware of their responsibility to the communities and societies in which they live and work, and strive to serve the public. Researchers should aim to maximise the benefits of the research and minimise the potential risk or harm to participants and researchers. All potential risk or harm should be mitigated by robust precautions. Independence of research should be maintained and any conflict of interest or partiality on behalf of the researchers, funding or commissioning body should be made explicit before and/or during a specific research project.

The issue of ethics is both important and complex in the context of social research for two main reasons: First, the research process involves many stakeholders, and the researcher holds responsibility towards all of them. This responsibility involves maintaining ethical conduct in the course of the research and presentation of data. Let us examine this issue closely. At the outset, the researcher holds responsibility towards the people he/she sets out to study. Also, his/her responsibility is due to the funding body (if any) of the researcher work; and the colleagues and/or other researchers who will consult the research work. Second, the results of the study are likely to add to the body of existing knowledge. It could also be used by policy makers. Any research which does not adhere to ethics could be misleading. Ethics in research entails accountability towards those who have contributed to the research in any way as also the consequences of one's research. Consider the example of a sociologist who heads a team of researchers. Let us assume he/she works on the issue of drug abuse among youth in Delhi. Now first of all he/she has to keep the well-being of the team members. They have to be paid well and in time. The social and psychological environment in which they work has to be conducive to their well-being. There could be a situation in which the researcher feels could be useful for research work but not for the team of researchers. The sociologist has to deal with the ethical dilemma of safe-guarding the team or furthering research (even at the cost of well-being of

the team of researchers). Additionally, a sociologist confronts the ethical issue of protecting the identity of the informants. There is a likelihood that social activists or the police seek of identity of the informants. The researcher confronts the ethical dilemma of revealing or concealing their identity. The third dilemma which a sociologist will encounter will relate with the presentation of data. Often informants provide information which they do not want to be made public. The sociologist owes ethical responsibility even as he/she such information (which could fetch him/her popularity) or keeping the confidence of informants in view.

3.3 ETHICAL CODE OF CONDUCT

Historically, the concern for ethics in research of any kind got highlighted in response to the controversies around the inappropriate conduct of research. The codification of commonly practiced ethical norms in terms of Ethical Codes, Guidelines or Conventions and Declarations were the natural outcome of such concerns at the national and international levels.

Now, many professional associations of the discipline have prescribed an ethical code of conduct for researchers. By establishing ethical codes, professional organizations seek to ensure integrity of the profession, define the expected conduct of members, and protect the welfare of subjects and clients. Moreover, ethical codes give professionals direction when confronting ethical dilemmas, or confusing situations

3.3.1 American Sociological Association

The American Sociological Association's (ASA's) Code of Ethics sets forth the principles and ethical standards that underlie sociologists' professional responsibilities and conduct. These principles and standards should be used as guidelines when examining everyday professional activities. They constitute normative statements for sociologists and provide guidance on issues that sociologists may encounter in their professional work.

Most of the Ethical Standards are broad-based in the sense that they as roles. Since the code for ethics is broad-based, it is likely that issues specific to particular research and not addressed. In such a situation the researcher has to use his/her wisdom to adopt ethical behaviour is that course of his/her research.

American sociological association (ASA) was first published the society's Code of Ethics in 1971 and revised it in 1997. It puts forth the following certain basic principles such as:

- Maintain objectivity and integrity in research
- Respect the subject's right to privacy and dignity
- Protect subjects from personal harm
- Preserve Confidentiality
- Seek informed consent when data are collected from research participants or when behaviour occurs in a private context

- Acknowledge research collaboration and assistance
- Disclose all sources of financial support (ASA 1997)

The revised formulation of the ASA *Code of Ethics*, published in 1997, restates the basic principles of serving the public good through scientific inquiry and avoiding harm to individuals or groups studied. The 1997 *Code*, though, stresses ethical challenges originating primarily from the researcher's personal objectives and decisions. For example it contains a major section on conflict of interest. According to this section, "conflicts of interest arise when sociologists' *personal or financial* interests prevent them from performing their professional work in an unbiased manner"

Box 3.1 Basic Principles of the SRA's (Social Research Association) ethical "code"

1. *Obligations to Society:* If social research is to remain of benefit to society and the groups and individuals within it, then social researchers must conduct their work responsibly and in light of the moral and legal order of the society in which they practice. They have a responsibility to maintain high scientific standards in the methods employed in the collection and analysis of data and the impartial assessment and dissemination of findings.
2. *Obligations to Financiers and Employer:* Researchers' relationship with and commitments to funders and/or employers should be clear and balanced. These should not compromise a commitment to morality and to the law and to the maintenance of standards commensurate with professional integrity.
3. *Obligations to Colleagues:* Social research depends upon the maintenance of standards and of appropriate professional behaviour that is shared amongst the professional research community. Without compromising obligations to funders/employers, subjects or society at large, this requires methods, procedures and findings to be open to collegial review. It also requires concern for the safety and security of colleagues when conducting field research.
4. *Obligations to Subjects:* Social researchers must strive to protect subjects from undue harm arising as a consequence of their participation in research. This requires that subjects' participation should be voluntary and as fully informed as possible and no group should be disadvantaged by routinely being excluded from consideration.

Source: SRA, *Ethical Guidelines*, December 2003

However, it is important to note that social researchers work within a variety of economic, cultural, legal and political settings, each of which influences the emphasis and focus of their research. Even within the same setting and branch of social research, individuals may have different moral precepts that guide their work. Thus no declaration could successfully impose a rigid set of rules to which social researchers everywhere should be expected to adhere. At best the ethical codes and guidelines offer a framework within which the conscientious social researcher can operate.

3.4 ISSUE OF OBJECTIVITY

The question of objectivity has been central to the methodological debates of the social sciences from the beginning. It means the willingness and ability to collect analysis data dispassionately i.e., without bias or value-based judgements. The conclusion should be independent of one's personal beliefs, likes and dislikes. Both the data and the interpretation drawn from their analysis must be free from bias and prejudices.

It is likely that a researcher is influenced by his/her own likes, dislikes biases and values. If this happens, then he/she will miss out on certain data which could be important to the study. Consider the case of a researcher who likes people with fair complexion and decides to collect data from them only. Surely, the research findings will be erroneous and not reflect social reality accurately. Similar situation will arise if the bias of a researcher towards language, religion, caste, class or some other factor influenced his/her research. Also, researcher should not generate or support discrimination of any kind in the course of research.

In his book, *German Ideological* Marx suggests that social scientist should study reality as it is rather than the ideas and impression that they have of it. According to him, the social scientist must begin research with focus on the real material production relations within which human beings live and create their conditions of life. Similarly, Émile Durkheim holds the view that sociologists should get rid of that preconceptions, or prejudices and treat social facts as things.

Weber argued for a *value free sociology* in which sociologists should only deal in with facts, and remain ethically neutral on the question of value.

Weber's general strategy was to *understand* the meaning of actors' practices and, and values. In doing so, not take sides on those practices and values. For instance, to understand the problem of drug abuse in society, researcher is not required to approve of and use drugs. In this way, social science can make a reference to practices and values without making value judgements. Weber maintains that researchers can provide a factual and objective assessment of actors and their practices.

Weber believed that social science research could not exclude the subjective meanings that people attach to their action. He argued in favour of value-free sociology by which he meant that the personal values of researchers should not interfere with the process of data collection or analysis. Weber also outlined the way researchers could dispense with their own values in research. According to him, a clear distinction should be maintained between 'what ought to be' and 'what is'. A maintained that sociologists should focus on 'what is'. He believed not objectivity in social research could be achieved if the social scientists relies on clear concepts for data analysis and draws logical conclusion.

Box 3.2 Weber's Method of Interpretative Understanding

Weber points out that a natural scientist's understanding of natural phenomena is from the outside. Let us take an example. When a chemist studies the properties of a particular substance, he does so from the outside. When a sociologist tries to understand human society and culture, he approaches it as an insider, or a participant. Being human, the social scientist has access to the motives and feelings of his/her subject matter. Social scientists can understand human action by probing the subjective meanings that actors attach to their own behaviour and the behaviour of others. Sociological understanding is thus qualitatively different from that of other sciences. Sociology, in Weber's opinion, must use the method of interpretative understanding or "*verstehen*" (which means 'to understand' in German). The method of *verstehen* implies that the sociologist should visualise the motivations of the actor by trying to interpret his feelings, his understanding of the situation. But is *verstehen* sufficient for sociological explanation? According to Weber, it is only the first step. The next step of analysis is casual explanation or searching for the causes or reasons behind the occurrence of any social phenomena.(ESO 13:15)

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Why are ethical considerations so important in social research? Use the space below to write your answer.

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- 2) What is meant by value neutrality? Use the space below to write your answer.

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3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN SOCIAL RESEARCH

Let us look into some of the important ethical concerns in social research.

3.5.1 Informed Consent

Informed consent is a basic ethical tenet of scientific research on human populations. Researchers must obtain participants' informed consent, and apprise them of the responsibilities and risks of research which are real or that which can

be foreseen. It is unethical to force people to participate in research or collect information from them without telling them the purpose.

Informed consent can be understood as people's voluntary agreement to participate in research based on a full understanding of the research and of the possible risks and benefits involved.

The basic elements of the consent process include full disclosure of the nature of the research and people's participation. It requires researchers to share some details about the purpose of research, possible benefits of participation, and, most importantly, possible risks associated with participating in that research with their subjects. In addition, researchers must describe how they will protect identities, how will the data collected be used and so on. All this information may be shared in an informed consent form that researchers provide to the participants. In some cases, subjects are asked to sign the consent form indicating that they have read it and fully understand its content. In other cases, subjects are simply provided a copy of the consent form and researchers are responsible for making sure that subjects have read and understand the form before proceeding with any kind of data collection. Participants should give consent freely i.e., without coercion or under pressure.

Adequate comprehension on the part of the potential informants needs to be ensured. There should be no ambiguity as it raises ethical concerns and may amount to deception on the part of the researcher. Any deception in research is inappropriate and takes advantage of the implicit trust and obedience given by the participants to the researcher.

When the participants volunteer, their dignity must be preserved and should not be taken for granted. Informants' voluntary choice to withdraw at any time should be respected. Under no circumstances may researchers proceed to conduct research with anyone who has refused to participate. At the outset, they should be made aware of their right to refuse participation whenever and for whatever reason they wish, without fear of penalisation or victimisation.

In observation studies, where behaviour patterns are observed without the subject's knowledge or consent, social researchers must take care not to infringe what may be referred to as the "private space" of an individual or group. However, this will vary from culture to culture. What may hold good for one community or group may be considered an infringement of privacy for any other group.

It is generally understood that observation without informed consent is only justified if:

- a) the investigation consists solely of observations of behaviour without the possibility of identifying individual subjects;
- b) the observations are made in a public place; and

- c) the information obtained is sufficiently important for science or public health and here is no other methodology that could be used to obtain the information.

3.5.2 Vulnerability of Research Participants

The concept of vulnerability has held a central place in research ethics guidance since its introduction in the United States Belmont Report in 1979. It calls for research which is mindful of the possibility that some participants may be vulnerable i.e., at higher risk of harm or wrong. Certain populations are considered more vulnerable than others because of their particular conditions or situations in life. In the context of human subjects research individuals or groups are vulnerable if they are unable fully and independently to protect their own interests, either due to intrinsic characteristics (e.g., age or immaturity), or circumstances (e.g., illness, incarceration, or poverty).

Research involving vulnerable populations requires additional protections that must be explicitly stated. Informed consent are more stringent for vulnerable populations. For example, minors must have the consent of a legal guardian in order to participate in research. Prisoners also qualify as vulnerable populations.

Economically or educationally disadvantaged individuals may be particularly vulnerable to the risks of research. Educationally disadvantaged subjects may not be able to fully understand the concepts presented by the research and the investigator should take extra precautions to ensure that the subjects fully understand what is being asked of them.

Similarly, economically disadvantaged subjects may be easily persuaded to participate in research if the economic compensation is so great that it would result in the subject ignoring or disregarding the research risks because of the income generated by the study. In such cases investigators should be careful to set economic compensation at a meaningful level that compensates the subject for her/his time, but it not so great that it becomes coercive. It is also important in such cases that the risks to the subjects be made clear to the subjects.

Thus any research with vulnerable populations entails efforts to meet the fundamental ethical precepts of doing no harm, respecting individuals, protecting privacy, supporting mutual participation, and providing informed consent. Individuals living with severely imbalanced power dynamics may have little experience in either negotiating or expecting those ethical precepts.

3.5.3 Anonymity and Confidentiality

Anonymity refers to concealing the identities of participants in all documents resulting from the research. Confidentiality is concerned with who has the right of access to the data provided by the participants.

Anonymity and confidentiality of participants are central to ethical research practice in social research. Where possible, researchers aim to assure participants that every effort will be made to ensure that the data they provide cannot be traced back to them in reports, presentations and other forms of dissemination.

The ethical duty of confidentiality refers to the obligation of an individual or organization to safeguard entrusted information from unauthorized access, use, disclosure, modification, loss or theft. Fulfilling the ethical duty of confidentiality is essential to the trust relationship between researcher and participant, and to the integrity of the research project.

Utmost care should be taken in deciding whether or not sensitive information should be recorded. Whenever subjects refuse to report personal information as they regard it an invasion of privacy, the researcher ought to respect their views. They also imply that privacy can be invaded when researchers study certain groups without their knowledge and without identifying themselves. Indeed, the respect for privacy in research is an internationally recognized norm and ethical standard. Some professional organizations have established codes that set out the conditions and obligations of their members regarding the collection, use and disclosure of personal information.

The primary method researchers use to preserve anonymity and confidentiality is the use of pseudonyms for participants and also for the location of the research. Another way to protect participants is through the collection and use of anonymous or anonymized data. For example, after information is anonymized, it is not possible to link new information to individuals within a dataset, or to return results to participants.

Technological developments have increased the ability to access, store and analyse large volumes of data. These activities may heighten risks of re-identification, such as when researchers link datasets or where a dataset contains information about a population in a small geographical area, or about individuals with unique characteristics. It is important to ensure that there is a strict procedure in place for storing confidential research data, such as audio and video recordings, interview and focus group transcripts, and survey responses.

3.5.4 Conflict of Interest

Conflict of interest may arise when activities or situations place an individual or institution in a real, potential or perceived conflict between the duties or responsibilities related to research, and personal, institutional or other interests. These interests can be related to business, commercial or financial. Conflict of interest must be assessed when conducting research as they may jeopardize the integrity of the research and the protection offered to participants. Conflicts of interest may also undermine the respect for participants that is fundamental to the principle of Justice.

Institutions may be in conflict of interest, for example, when they:

- a) sponsor a research project;
- b) manage the intellectual property that forms the basis of a research project or stand to benefit from intellectual property resulting from the research;
- c) hold equity in companies and/or receive major donations; or

- d) have conflicting roles carried out by one institutional official (e.g., a vice-president who is responsible for the promotion of research activity and funding and also for oversight of research).

Acting in a professional role within the institution, individuals (e.g., institution president, vice-president, dean of a faculty or department head) are in a conflict of interest when they are subject to competing incentives or functions. These may significantly interfere with the impartial exercise of duties, including legal and ethical obligations within the institutional structure. The conflict may be chronic, relating to recurring situations resulting from the institutional structure, or it may be triggered by a unique situation that is not likely to recur.

3.5.5 Integrity and Transparency

Financial support for research is obtained from many sources. The responsibility for ensuring that the funds and resources are utilized optimally without any misconduct rests on the shoulders of the researchers, as well as the respective institute ethics committees along with the funding organizations. This calls for the development of a code for utilization of these funds appropriately.

Hence, it is important and should be made mandatory that every institute should set down the broad principles of responsible and accountable research practice and identify the responsibilities of institutions and researchers in areas such as data and record management, publication of findings, authorship, conflict of interest, supervision of students and research trainees and the handling of utilization of funds

It is the researcher's responsibility to ensure that they do not compromise their own personal ethical and methodological standards and should not accept contractual conditions that are contingent upon a particular outcome from a proposed inquiry, such as guaranteed response rates or a previously conceived outcome.

All the stages of research design and data collection and analysis should be documented appropriately so the research process is transparent and auditable. This approach has the benefit of making it easy to differentiate between data that is being interpreted in self-interested ways by researchers, and data that is analysed with a transparent logic, therefore representing the best available evidence. Conducting research in this way provides value to society and generates trust, by enabling them to evaluate their practices and beliefs with respect to credible data and interpretation.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Describe any two ethical issues that may emerge during sociological research.

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- 2) Do you think modern Information and Communication Technology raises ethical concerns? Explain.

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3.6 LET US SUM UP

Ethical dilemmas will however continue to pose challenge before the researchers. It is critical that careful scrutiny and assessment needs to be taken time to time to minimize the severity and frequency of these problems. By establishing ethical codes, professional organizations maintain the integrity of the profession, define the expected conduct of members, and protect the welfare of subjects and clients. Moreover, ethical codes give professionals direction when confronting ethical dilemmas, or confusing situations ethical codes and guidelines offer a framework within which the conscientious social researcher can operate. In this unit, we discussed some of the major ethical concerns in social science research.

3.7 REFERENCES

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3.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Ethical considerations are of particular importance in social research because sociologists study people. Thus, sociologists must adhere to a rigorous code of ethics which refers to formal guidelines for conducting research, consisting of principles and ethical standards concerning the treatment of human individuals.
- 2) Value neutrality is a practice of remaining impartial, without bias or judgment, during the course of a study and in publishing results. Value neutrality, however, does not mean having no opinions. It means striving to overcome personal biases when analysing data. Investigators are ethically obligated to report results, even when they contradict personal views, predicted outcomes, or widely accepted beliefs. In Weber's view, under no condition could a researcher allow his personal feelings to influence the interpretation of data.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Important ethical guidelines in human-subject research concerns privacy and confidentiality. When they do research, sociologists should

protect the privacy and confidentiality of their subjects. When a survey is used, the data must be coded (prepared for computer analysis) anonymously, and in no way should it be possible for any answers to be connected with the respondent who gave them. In field research, anonymity must also be maintained, and aliases (fake names) should normally be used when the researcher reports what she or he has been observing.

Another ethical issue concerns *consent*. Before a researcher can begin obtaining data, the subjects of the research must normally sign an *informed consent* form. This form summarizes the aims of the study and the possible risks of being a subject.

- 2) The widespread use of computers is often regarded as a threat to individuals and organisations because it provides new methods of disclosing and linking identified records. On the other hand, the social researcher could exploit the impressive capacity of modern information technology to disguise identities and to enhance data security.