



SRAP1001 NOTES



1. Introduction to Social Research:

What is meant by social research:

- 'academic research on topics relating to questions relevant to the social scientific fields, such as sociology, human geography, social policy, politics, and criminology' (3)
- Motivated from a range of changes in order to have social scientific ideas to shed light on these changes - using social sciences for ideas
 - Social research is distinguished by the fact that it is rooted in and draws on the ideas and intellectual traditions of the social sciences

Why do social research?

- Occur when questions occur to academics when they read literature on a topic
 - May result due to gaps in info or inconsistency between studies or and unresolved issue
 - Also, developments in society can act as catalysts for study
- At its core - 'there is an aspect of our understanding of what goes on in society that is unresolved' (3)

The context of social research methods:

- There are a number of ways in which social research and methods are influenced from external factors
- Factors form the part of the context within which social research and its methods work:
 - Theories which social scientists use to understand the social world -> influence what is researched and how it is interpreted
 - Social research is informed and influenced by theory - also contributing to theory as it feeds into the stock of knowledge to which the theory relates
 - Existing knowledge forms an important part of context - need to acquaint oneself with what is already known about the research area so there is information to build on rather than repeat
 - Researcher's views about nature of relationship between theory and research
 - Two different processes: theory drives collection of data; theory emerges from data
 - Assumptions and views about how research should be conducted influence the research process
 - Scientific vs non-scientific vs epistemological
 - Assumptions about nature of social phenomena influence research process
 - Social world being external vs internal
 - Values of research community have significant implications for research
 - Ethical issues; strong view that those being researched should be involved in the research process
 - Question of what research is for
 - Need for practical purpose (rather than academic nature and role) - making a difference to the world around us (particularly social policy)
 - Social research operating within a wider political context
 - Certain research issues are likely to receive financial support over others (much social research being funded via gov. bodies) - also additional advantages in who receives funding
 - Training and personal values of a researcher influence research area, questions, and methods
 - Development of methodological preferences carries the risk of researchers becoming narrow-minded about what they know - although, often emerge having implications for research

Elements of the process of social research:

Literature Review: A critical examination of existing research relating to the phenomena of interest and of relevant theoretical ideas

- Need to read further to determine a number of things
 - What's already known; concepts and theories applied to topic; research methods applied; controversies related; clashes of evidence; key contributors to research topic
- Reading key books and articles and the main figures within the field
- Being able to link own research, questions, findings, and discussion to the existing literature -> demonstrates credibility and contribution of research
- Expected to be critical

Concepts and theories: the ideas that drive the research process and that shed light on the interpretation of the resulting findings. These findings contribute to the ideas

- **Concepts:** the way that we make sense of the social world
 - Labels given to aspects of the social world that seem to have common features that strike us as sig.
- E.g. bureaucracy, power, social control
- SS = strong tradition of concepts
- Concepts act as key ingredients of theories
- They signal research interests, discipline the focus of studies
- Concepts may be viewed as something that either: drives research to shed light on a concept vs concepts as an outcome of research
 - Not mutually exclusive
- Past literature = really important as it provides main concepts and the usefulness of those and the issues surrounding those concepts

Research questions: A question that provides an explicit statement of what it is the researched wants to find out about

- Force the researched to consider that most basic of issues - what is it about the area of interest that you want to know
- Narrows down and focusing more directly
- Necessary for good research
- They help to:
 - Guide literature search; guide decisions about kind of research; data collection and from whom; analysis of data; writing-up of data; unnecessary research; clears understandings for readers for what your research is about
- At an early stage of a research study - research questions and the literature relating to them are likely to be intertwined
 - This is as reading literature maybe prompt you to revise your research questions and potential to suggest new ones

Sampling cases: The selection of cases that are relevant to the research questions

- 'cases' refers to the wide variety of objects on which or from which data will be collected - mostly people
- Time and cost issues are always a strain -> leading to a need to sample
- Many different principles behind sampling
- An important stage of any investigation

Data collection: Gathering data from the sample so that the research questions can be answered

- Both structured and unstructured data collection methods

Condensed notes:

1. Introduction to Social Research:

- Questioning of who does the research - and how it is run - what questions are actually asked
 - How was consent given from the people (how is research made ethical)?
 - Refusal rate to participate, and chance of attempt to skew the results untruthfully
- Need for a standardised approach
 - Answers for why and how things happened - with reason

Social research: the systematic examination of a society's attitudes, assumptions, beliefs, trends and relationships

- The scope can be small or large, ranging from the self or a single individual to spanning an entire country
 - Ultimately, a want to gain understandings of social phenomena and how social worlds function

Three types of social research:

- **Exploratory research:** explores or opens up new areas of social enquiry
- **Descriptive research:** has as its major purpose to describe social phenomenon
- **Explanatory research:** provides or develops explanations of the social world or social phenomena
 - Also explores the different ways in which there can be change made

Social research often portrayed as a linear process - however it often is not

- Nature of social research often complex and dynamic

Process (of social research):

1. identify a topic
2. review lit
3. formulate research questions/hypotheses
4. designing the study
 - a. Ethical considerations
 - b. Defining key variables
5. collecting data
6. processing and analysing data
7. interpreting findings
8. writing the research report

Interests in social areas (we were asked about our differing interests in social areas):

- Marginalised youth groups and their development - esp. in the CJS
- How young people are affected by DV - and gender how gender roles affect DV
- Seniors w/out family or children - (esp. due to a focus from the government advising families to care for their seniors)
- Climate denial
- Multiculturalism in Australia and how individuals are affected - esp. marginalised groups

2. Research strategies and designs:

Recap on common research process

Process:

1. identify a topic
2. formulate research questions/hypotheses
3. review lit

4. designing the study - focus of lecture
5. collecting data
6. processing and analysing data
7. interpreting findings
8. writing the research report

Research question:

- States what the study will investigate or attempt to improve
- Good research questions are the key to a good study
- Types:
 - Descriptive/exploratory (what is/are? How?)
 - Relational/explanatory (Are X and Y related? Does X explain Y?)
 - Casual/evaluative (Does X cause Y? Does X reduce Y?)

Hypothesis:

- A proposed explanation about an observable phenomenon
- An idea or explanation for something that is based on known facts but has not yet been proved
- A statement asserting a relationship between concepts
 - Is to be tested and proved
- Has not been yet tested or proven
- Relationship between hypothesis and research question -
 - E.g. RQ: does social support influence life satisfaction - H: individuals with more social support are more satisfied with their lives
 - Social support (independent) + life satisfaction (dependent)

Research Strategies:

What is a research strategy?

- The general orientation to the conduct of social research
- Informs all aspects of the research project (internal consistency is v important)
- Informed by:
 - Research questions
 - Approaches/beliefs in the nature of knowledge

Theory and data:

- **Social theory:** an abstract idea or set of ideas that explain social phenomena
- **Empirical data:** pieces of info that are the result of observing and/or measuring social phenomena
 - Can be illustrated and numerous forms
- Relationship between the two?
 - Without empirical supporting data, theory is an unproven speculation
 - Without theory, researchers cannot make overall sense of what they are seeing in the data
 - Theoretical positioning influences the collection of empirical data and guides the analysis of the research
- Two different approaches to understanding relationship between theory and data - Deductive and inductive

Deduction or "top down"

- Deductive research - works from the more general to the more specific. Steps include:
 - Identify a theory about the topic of interest
 - Narrow that down into more specific hypotheses that can be tested
 - Narrow down even further when we collect observations to address the hypotheses
 - Test the hypotheses with specific data -- a confirmation (or not) of the original theories

Induction or "bottom up"

- Inductive research - works from specific observations to broader generalisations and theories
 - Begin with specific observations and measures
 - Detect patterns and regularities
 - Formulate some tentative hypotheses that we can explore
 - End up developing some general conclusions or theories

Qualitative and Quantitative research strategies:

Quantitative strategy	Qualitative strategy
Deductive approach to theory	Inductive approach to theory
Objectivist/Positivist approach	Constructionist/interpretivist approach
Measuring social variables (quantification)	Understanding subjective meanings
Numerical data	Data are words, texts, stories
Generalisation	Contextualisation
Surveys, experiments	Interviews, ethnography
Structured	Unstructured or less structured
Statistical analysis	Non-statistical analysis

Why quantify:

- Some users of research prefer numbers and statistics
- Quantitative strategies can be used to:
 - Describe extent, frequency, proportion
 - Generalise observations beyond sample of interest
 - Compared differences between groups or situations
 - Investigate associations that imply extent

Weaknesses of quantitative research:

- Seeks to be objective but often ignores the socially-constructed nature of reality
- Often involves artificial settings
- Responses can be distorted by fixed choices
- Issues with non-response, self-selection bias, self-reporting bias

Why use qualitative methods?

- Some users of research prefer findings in verbal or textual form
- Qualitative strategies can be used to:
 - Understand social practices within a particular context
 - Explore meaning from the perspective of participants
 - Develop (grounded) theory from detail data about a situation