M.A. PSYCHOLOGY

SEMESTER - III (CBCS)

PSYCHOLOGY
PAPER- COURSE VI
(ELECTIVE COMPONENT)

PRACTICUM IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

SUBJECT CODE : PAPSY306 D

Prof. Ravindra Kulkarni
Vice Chancellor
University of Mumbai, Mumbai.

Prin. Dr. Ajay Bhamare
Pro Vice-Chancellor,
University of Mumbai.

Prof. Santosh Rathod
I/c, Director
IDOL, University of Mumbai.

Programe Co-ordinator : **Anil R. Bankar**
Head, Faculty of Humanities, IDOL,
University of Mumbai.

Course Co-ordinator : **Mr. Sachin Vasant Sutar**
Assistant Professor (Psychology),
IDOL, University of Mumbai.

Course Writers : **Dr. Archana R. S. Kamble**
Former coordinator of IDOL.

December 2023, Print I,

Published by
Director
Institute of Distance and Open Learning, University of Mumbai, Vidyanagari, Mumbai - 400 098.

DTP COMPOSED AND PRINTED BY
Mumbai University Press,
Vidyanagari, Santacruz (E), Mumbai - 400098.

CONTENTS

*****

Practical/Field Work Component (Elective Component): PAPSY 306D 10 Credits, 150 hrs.
PRACTICUM IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Objectives:

1. To train students to conduct action research and to develop action plans in social areas
2. To orient students towards society through field visits and structured exercise
3. To help students gain experience through conducting focus group discussion and social experiments

Unit 1: Field Visits and Placements

Students will be placed in institutions/organizations in consultation with the course teacher. Students will have to study from social psychological perspective the individual cases (case study). Students will have to submit two detailed case study reports.

Unit 2: Action Research

In this component students are required to take up an action research which aims to contribute to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to formulate the action plan and submit a detailed proposal accordingly.

Unit 3: Structured Exercise

Structured exercise (any two). In consultation with the course-teacher, students are required to plan, design and conduct structured exercises in any of the following areas: self awareness, team building, interpersonal skills, leadership skills, decision making, problem solving, creativity, communication, conflict management, and stress management.

Unit 4: Social Experiment

In this component students are supposed to identify a social problem in the society and will have to make presentations in the class on the conduction of field experiment surrounding the problem at hand. The nature of the presentation (either individual or group) would be decided depending on the number of students enrolled in the course and other factors. Once all the presentations are done, one single field experiment would be selected as the entire group's activity, and all students then will work on that group assignment. Students will have to submit a brief report of this assignment containing their analysis from social psychological perspective. In their final report they are also required to include their initial individual experiments presented in the class.

Unit 5: Focused Group Discussion

Student conduct a focused group discussion either based on need diagnostic or problem-focused group study in any area of social relevance, and submit a report. Students will follow these steps—selecting the team, selecting the participants, deciding on time and location, preparing for and conducting focus group discussion, and submitting a report.

Essential Reading

Pfeiffer, J.W. & Jones, J.E. (1973). *A Handbook of structured Experiences for Human Relations Training.* San Diego, CA: University Associates Inc.

McNiff, J. (2002). *Action Research: Principles and Practice.*Houndsmills: Macmillan Education.

Pines, A.M. & Maslach, C. (2002). *Experiencing Social Psychology: Readings and Projects* (4th ed.). New Delhi: Mc Graw Hill.

Breakwell, G.M. (2004). *Doing Social Psychology Research*. Malden, MA: British Psychological Society and Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
Krueger, R.A., & Casey, M.A. (2009). *Focus Groups: A practical guide for Applied Research* (4th ed.). Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
Litosselitti, L. (2003). Using Focus Groups in Research. New York, NY: Continuum.
Barbour, R. (2007). *Doing Focus Groups*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Evaluation
Internal Evaluation (40 marks):
Field visit and placements (institute): 10 marks
Action Research: 05 marks
Structured Exercise: 10 marks
Social experiment: 10 marks
Focused group discussion: 05 marks

Semester end examination: 60 marks
Viva: 40 marks
Attempt two questions out of four: 20 marks

*****

1

FIELD VISITS AND PLACEMENTS

Unit Structure

1.0 OBJECTIVES

- To know what are field visits and placement
- To understand your role/involvement in field visits and placement
- To understand what is a case study and how to write it
- To perform an exercise to conduct case studies and report them.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Since school days, we have been learning the fact that humans are social animals. We, as humans, have intelligence and a wide range of emotions that distinguish us from other animals. Like other animals and organisms, we have a continuous interaction with the environment in which we live. We have interaction with other people in our society, community, workplace, etc. This interaction is mostly active in nature. Whenever we come into contact with other people, we learn their behaviours, habits, nature, etc. Based on this learning, we tend to develop some kind of relationship with many other people whom we come across frequently throughout our lifespan. This is in the context of our day-to-day interpersonal and social life.

However, many times we also need to interact with other people as a part of our work. We also may need to interact with them as a part of some scientific study, wherein we are trying to learn and understand a particular phenomenon. We develop some hypotheses or research questions or formulate some research problem in order to study that phenomenon and try to reach the answer to those questions or solutions to those research problems. For this purpose, we adopt some methods that will provide us with a formal platform for making contacts with people and collecting data from people whom we want to study or for visiting the places that will enable us to study the phenomenon of our interest.

In this unit, we will be learning two such methods which help us in studying people and/or a phenomenon formally and scientifically. They are field visits and placements, and other ones called case studies, which are interrelated activities. We will also learn the way of dealing with people we want to study and reporting such studies in a somewhat structured format. Let us have a look at these two important concepts.

1.1.1 Field Visit and Placements:

Field visit in simple words is generally a student's visit to any such place, often in the community, for required hours, which combines a great learning experience with theoretical knowledge for students. Placement, on the other hand, is a program of placing the students in community-based places, assigning them to such field visits. Field visits are short-term experiential placements of students in a hospital or any other community-based institution or organization. Generally, these visits may last anywhere between 1 hour and 10 days. However, the duration of the visits may differ as per the field or need of the academic courses.

Students attending these field visits, mostly as a part of their academic course, are called interns, who benefit from this activity in terms of enriched learning experience. Hence, as a flexible approach to a meaningful learning opportunity, field visits through placements are a very promising platform for students for working in the community and for the community.

Arranging placements and field visits:

Placements and field visits are generally arranged by the course-provider institutions/course teachers, who are handling that subject in particular. For this purpose, they often need to coordinate with authorities in hospitals or community-based places, such as schools, NGOs, etc. that can offer field visit facilities to students. Here are a few important steps specified, once the placement program is fixed and field visits with the required duration are arranged:

- An introductory lecture is conducted for students by the concerned authority and/or teacher. Students are informed about the aim of field visits, visit schedules, the precautions that should be taken and expected behaviour by students while dealing with cases, and the rules that they are expected to follow when present on the premises of these community-based places.

- Teachers announce some common instructions, provide guidelines, and may share useful tips before students attend their first day of field visits. This enables students to gain confidence and understand the role clearly that they are supposed to play professionally during these field visits.

- A large number of students can be grouped and group leaders can be handed over the responsibility to coordinate between their respective groups and authorities of both institutions - their own and from the

places of their field visits. Teachers also may take the help of assistants who may handle the charge of these field visits on behalf of teachers and report to them about the progress of field visits timely.

- A formal meeting also may be arranged at the decided place on the first day of the field visit. It is mainly aimed to introduce students to the concerned authorities and the supportive staff at the place of field visit. This enables students to feel secure and know whom they should approach readily during their field visit hours, if they come across any difficulty when their teachers may not be available, to bring the situation under control.

- Once the field visits start regularly as per the decided schedule, subsequent lectures or meetings can be arranged in between till the field visits end at a particular place. The purpose of such lectures/meetings is to provide students with the opportunity to share their experiences on the field and with solutions to their difficulties on the field, if any.

- Such meetings also enable students to reflect on their behaviour, any mistake committed by them, etc. in particular, which they should correct to avoid further possible difficulties during their next visits.

- Finally, a concluding meeting is also arranged in which teachers get updates from the students about their overall progress in the field visit and their overall experience with this learning experience. Also, they may be further instructed about a case study reporting task which they are supposed to do after the completion of field visits and provide them with guidelines for the same.

Thus, overall such placement and field visits offer students not only learning experiences, but also provide them with opportunities to exercise some freedom as in charge and learn to apply their knowledge to deal with present situations. This helps them boost their confidence, and improve social skills, and practical skills like decision-making and problem-solving. Thus, field visits and placements offer students a live experience of being a part of their future workplace/s. In other words, students get to learn how to deal with the problems of actual patients/clients, and how to handle the overall situation in future, such as dealing with the clients' family members whenever required, providing clients and their family members with required help and support, etc. Also, providing support and encouragement is important during such field visits and placements that motivate students to use their initiative when engaged in such placements and visits (Smith & Flint, 2006).

A research study by Cummins et al. (2010) showed that nursing students evaluated field visits very positively. These students' responses indicated that the field visits provided them with a wealth of learning opportunities and enhanced their knowledge and awareness of services available to children and their families in the community. Thus, field visits have value as one of the important teaching methods and short-term experiential

placements (Scarce, 1997). However, placements need to be done very carefully, so that one placement area should not have a risk of getting burdened with too many students.

In Australia, providing students with community placements has been proposed as one strategy for future graduate nurses to become familiar with the rural workplace and future employment opportunities in the community (Smith et al., 2001). Also, another project-focused community placement for nurses (Smith & Flint, 2006) introduced in Australia aimed to facilitate students gain an appreciation of citizens' needs as a basis for developing skills towards working in partnership with communities as registered nurses. Cummins et al. (2010) pointed out the fact that the value of field visits and placements as meaningful learning opportunities has been undermined and that there is limited literature to date regarding this.

Advantages of field visits and placements:

There are many advantages of field visits and placements to students as well as to the community. They are as follows:

- Field visits and placements serve as a secondary learning experience.
- They are one of the important teaching methods (Scarce, 1997).
- They are integrated and community approach to learning.
- They are a flexible approach to meaningful learning opportunities for students.
- They provide students with an opportunity to get familiar with the workplace and its functioning.
- They involve reflection on experience, with both the nature and quality of the experience which is significant to overall learning (Scarce, 1997).
- They make students aware of a range of services available for people in need in the community.
- They make students learn about appreciating the need of people seeking services.
- They provide opportunities for new placement experiences that can increase time in the community if they are structured to enhance the integration of learning between theory and practice.
- They are likely to generate future employment opportunities in the community.
- Learning through direct involvement in the form of field visits is likely to increase motivation and encourage them to have control over their learning (Swallow & Coates, 2004).

Shortcomings of field visits and placements:

A few shortcomings of the field visits through placements are as follows:

- Failure in arranging proper placements leads to a risk of one or just a few places getting overcrowded with students.
- Students may fail to learn adequately if too many students are placed at a time in the same institution or organization (Harrison, 2004).
- Shortage of placements can result in little time or flexibility to expose students to a broader range of services that are accessed in the community.
- Modules in the courses are structured into distinct units of study. This can lead to a risk that students are likely to compartmentalize their learning rather than make connections between learning (Rust, 2000). This often makes it difficult to work towards an integrated curriculum in modularized programmes, which can reduce the effectiveness of the placement programmes.

However, considering the maximum advantages of the field visits and placements, short placement initiatives are planned in many countries like the United Kingdom, Australia, and Ireland, mainly for broadening students' practice placement with a focus on the community. The structure and process of such placement programs and field visits may differ in different countries and according to the field. The timetable of the field visits should be planned in such a way that it should bridge practice with theory and it should encourage the integration of learning among students. It is also important to guide students about the broad aim of the field visits and why they are planned in their course curriculum. Students should be provided with guidelines that include a list of a range of community services that they could access as field visits. To overcome a shortage of placement, students can be handed over responsibility at times to negotiate access to field visits. They can be encouraged to seek out services in their hometown community areas.

Challenges for field visits and placements:

Considering advantages and disadvantages, there are some challenges in initiating placement and field visit programs that could be as follows:

- Placing the increasing number of students in proportion to avoid overcrowding at one or only a few community-based places.
- Dealing with a shortage of placements to maximize the integrated experience of learning for students
- Providing students with ample time and flexibility to expose them to a broader range of services accessed in the community
- Planning a timetable of field visits in order to bridge practice and theory

- Working towards an integrated curriculum in modularized programmes.

In this section, we have learned about field visits and placements and their practical value. However, an overall scenario suggests a few possibilities in this context when it is said that the practical value of field visits and placements is undermined as suggested by Cummins et al. (2010). They are as follows:

- There may be a limited number of places for arranging field visits and placements in comparison to an increasing number of students who are willing to earn practical knowledge through such learning experiences. In such cases, fear of overcrowding the available places arises as suggested by Harrison (2004).

- Academic institutions themselves may feel reluctant or find it difficult to arrange such placements due to the amount of effort and resources that need to invest while arranging them.

- In some other cases, academic institutions themselves may be lacking adequate facilities in their institutions or adequate motivation discouraging them to plan such field visits and placement for their students in other institutions.

- It may be difficult to arrange due to incapability on the part of either party – academic institutions or the possible community-based places.

- Some hospitals and/or community-based places may deny allowing such field visits in their institutions due to some kind of temporary or permanent technical difficulties or even due to the risk involved in allowing such field visits, considering their policies regarding ethical considerations related to people seeking services from them.

- Arranging such field visits and placements for students learning in distant mode from open universities would be practically difficult because a large number of students cannot attend such visits as they are working.

- As Cummins et al. (2010) suggested, there is little literature to date addressing the potential about the potential of community field visits as meaningful learning opportunities which prevents awareness of the same and in turn prevents such field visits and placements also being conducted.

The next sub-section will introduce you to another important activity related to field visits and placement called case studies. Let us learn in detail about this activity.

1.1.2 Case Study:

Typically, a case study involves participants with a problem situation. It can be effective in helping people to transfer learning to real-life situations. It may be a description of real or hypothetical problem

situations that may exist in a group of people. It is helpful to understand some dynamics of such groups with a problem situation in terms of description of the situation, people who are affected by it, possible causes of problems; and strengths and weaknesses of the groups facing the problem. The role that can be played by the facilitator (e.g., president of the organization, principal or class-teacher in the school, etc.) also can be understood for more ease in the activity.

The purpose of conducting case studies may differ according to the various fields. Accordingly, methods of conducting case studies and writing case study reports will differ according to the fields. For example, in college settings, a case study is used as training for future roles and is primarily designed for people who can make decisions or take actions in their own organizations or who have authority or responsibility (NA, 1998). Hence, these people are participants in a case study. Also, in organizational settings, a case study is used more like a role-play technique often involving group discussions with these participants, where a facilitator is like a therapist/counselor in the psychological counselling sessions.

However, in the field of psychology, a case study is more like interviewing the person with an intended problem situation undertaken for the study and case study reports are mere objective descriptions of the cases, which later may be studied by the researchers interested in studying that particular problem situation in future. These case studies may serve as a source of knowledge about that particular situation and people who faced those problem situations.

According to Willings (1968), there are four types of cases in a very general sense: a) individual problem, b) isolated incident, c) organizational problems, and d) a combination of some of these three types. Thus, a focus of a case study can be a person, incident, or situation. According to Willings (1969), the case study process includes a stated problem and existing information (the written case), required information, the actual problem, objectives in problem-solving, possible solutions, possible effects of them, best action/s, and ways to deal with the effects and prevent problems in the future.

A good case study achieves a balance between facts and people and their feelings. It also explains how the situation developed and how it was dealt with. Since the case study is believed to be the domain of the participants, it is suggested that the case writers do not include their own opinions, analysis, evaluation, or answers. The case study is used to develop critical analysis and decision-making skills.

How to conduct case studies?

A case study can be conducted individually, as well as in a group. Conducting such case studies involves the following general steps:

Gathering basic knowledge about a problem situation:

A person who is intended to take a case study is supposed to gather some basic knowledge about a problem situation. He or she should also learn some basic techniques for dealing with participants with such problem situations. This helps the person to conduct case studies with ease. We will learn more about this gradually as we proceed further.

Preparing a list of questions:

The next step is to prepare a list of questions that will help in studying the problem situation among the intended participants. This will give clarity about the information that is to be gathered and the way it should be gathered with ease from the participants through a case study.

Identifying the places for conducting case studies:

Once this basic preparation is done, one has to identify the places from where he or she can find the participants with the same problem situation of his or her interest.

Identifying the facilitators, if required:

After listing down such various possible places, one may also identify the person/s who would help in establishing the primary contact between the person intending to take the case study and the participants. Such facilitators could be authorities, such as the principal of the school/college, the in-charge of the institutions, the chairperson of the society, etc. if the participants of the case studies are to be chosen from the formal settings. In other cases, wherein the places are not so formal, the facilitator could be such people who have better knowledge about a particular area, or geographical location from where the participants can be identified. Sometimes translators or interpreters also may be required if the intended participants belong to different cultures and languages. With the help of such mediating people, possibly a day can be fixed for taking case studies according to the convenience of both sides. If possible, fixing the day also can be done by contacting the willing participants directly without any mediator.

Reaching the place on the decided day and time:

It is important to reach the place for taking case studies most possibly on the decided day and time, planning neatly by considering possible delays in travelling and/or some other time-consuming tasks. This will reflect one's respect for the participants' time, genuineness in the purpose of studying, and dedication to his or her own work. This will also increase the chances of cooperation on the participants' side and get the intended information from them.

Rapport-building:

For this purpose, again the help of mediators may be acquired in contacting the participants. With their help, some informal conversations may take place between the case study interviewer and the participants for

rapport-building. Rapport-building is essential for making the participants comfortable to obtain maximum information from them with ease.

Communicating ethical considerations to participants:

This can be done by ensuring the privacy and confidentiality of the information that will be shared by the participants. They should be communicated that the information shared by them will not be disclosed anywhere without their permission. Also, they are given the understanding of the freedom they have for withdrawing from the case study. This will help in making the participants feel secure and comfortable, which will increase cooperation on their side.

Interviewing the participants:

This is a very important and critical stage of conducting the case studies. It is actually the step, where one needs to apply all relevant counselling-related skills, which we have been studying as a student of Psychology. A few guidelines that should be followed while conducting a case study interview are as follows:

Way of interviewing:

Once all the background is set, one can start interviewing the participants with a prepared set of questions about the problem situation he or she wants to study. However, the interview should not take place in a mechanical way. The interviewer must ask the questions to the participants in a very sensitive manner. A wrong way of asking questions can create some disturbance or discomfort in the participant. This can also lead to the discontinuation of the interview due to further non-cooperation by the participants. Hence, the interviewer should ask the questions in a very composed manner by regulating all his or her curiosity, excitement, and other such positive or negative feelings which may not be appropriate at the moment and may cause discomfort to the participant. Thus, 'how the questions are being asked' matters more than 'what questions are being asked' at this stage, which determines the level of cooperation from the participants in order to make the interview successful. Thus, not only the interviewer will be satisfied with achieving what he or she intended, but the participants also may have the feeling of relaxation for having the opportunity to share their feelings and thoughts, maybe for the reason that they could not do before by expressing so freely.

Active listening:

The interviewer must practice active listening throughout the interview session. Thus, participants should be encouraged to share maximum information through appropriate behaviour with the least interference by the interviewer when they are answering the questions or want to share some information willingly. In case, the participants are talkative and start sharing some unnecessary details, the interviewer should listen to it passively, that is without interrogating much into it, which will in turn

help in discouraging such communication without any kind of disrespect to the participant and with ease for the interviewer.

Way of responding to the participant:

The interviewer should maintain balance in responding neutrally and with emotions, whenever necessary. Remember, this is not a formal counselling session where the client approaches you for professional help, but just an interview where you are collecting some required information from participants. So, responding with some amount of emotions, including empathy can be exercised a little. However, the interviewer's way of responding should not reflect any judgement or prejudice. This will make the participants understand that their feelings, thoughts, opinions, and experiences are being understood and respected by the interviewer.

Nature of questions:

Though the way of asking questions is very important while interviewing, the nature of the questions being asked is also equally important. This also determines the level of cooperation from the participants. Possibly such questions should be avoided that may cause discomfort to the participants. Also, there should be a shorter list of questions, which will make the interview process shorter and more convenient for both considering the time factor. Hence, it is also important to have such powerful questions which would help in gathering maximum information from the participants in lesser time without putting them in discomfort.

Duration of the case study:

This is one more important aspect that should be considered in combination with the nature of the questions discussed above. That is, the list of questions should be shorter, so that the duration of case studies will be reduced automatically. This will help in gathering the maximum required information conveniently in a shorter period of time. Also, it will not be a frustrating and boring task for both – the case study interviewer and especially, the participants.

Way of recording responses:

One more important precaution should be practised when recording the responses of the participants. Whatever means will be used for recording the responses, must be used after making the participants aware of it and with their consent and permission. In case, the participant is not comfortable with any particular method for his or her responses being recorded, it should be changed. For example, if the participant is not comfortable for some reason with his or her responses being tape-recorded, the interviewer should change the method and may simply note down the responses of the participants in a notebook instead of tape-recording the responses.

Thus, taking maximum precautions will enable one to get more valuable information from the participants and with maximum cooperation on their

side for study purposes. Here the stage of conducting case studies is completed. The next stage is documenting or reporting the case studies, called case study reports. Let us have a look at this process.

How to report case studies?

While reporting case studies also we should keep some guidelines in mind. Here we will need to take care of the language and manner of presenting the case study. Some of the guidelines have been provided in the next Section 1.2 in brief. In this section, we will understand them minutely.

Intention of reporting case studies:

The intention of reporting the case studies should be very genuine. It should not be done for the sake of academic benefit as a student or other such gains in professional life. Such case studies report may have the potential to provide insight into some other unseen problem situation, which can be investigated in future to benefit many other people with the same.

Way of reporting case studies:

Case studies should be reported in a very sensitive, responsible, and careful manner. One should keep in mind that he or she is documenting some important information shared by the participant with trust.

Language of reporting case studies:

The language that should be used to report case studies should be objective, and free of biases and prejudices. It should be non-judgemental and should not reflect any extreme views about the participant. That is it should be neutral and simple. Also, the language should not be metaphorical, highlighting the positive or negative aspects. The most important thing is a case study report should be written in the past tense since it was part of a case study interview which has already been completed.

Maintain originality:

Case studies should reflect the observations of the interviewer of the case study rather than copying others' content in your case study reports as yours. Copying others' content or even whole case study reports as yours or copying your own previously submitted report for some other course may spoil your impression when detected. Also, the case study reports presented will be misleading and will be of no practical use. This tendency called plagiarism and self-plagiarism may cost you academically and even professionally in later life.

Ethical considerations:

While writing the case study reports one should strictly follow the ethical principles regarding privacy and confidentiality. There could be some very personal issues in the participants' life which they might have disclosed to

the case study interviewer with trust. As a case study reporter, you should report such personal material with extreme care without being judgemental only in case there is any possible connection between these issues and the current problem situation that you are studying. Reporting such issues can be avoided safely otherwise, respecting participants' privacy.

After learning about field visits, placements and case studies in this section, you will be confident enough to have your live experiences with field visits, placements and case studies; which will enhance your knowledge and skills in the field of psychology from the practical point of view. Once you complete your field visits with assigned placements and conduct case studies, the next exercise will be writing case study reports. Sections 1.1.2 and 1.2 combinedly will guide and help you in this writing exercise.

1.2 EXERCISE TO PERFORM: CONDUCTING CASE STUDY AND REPORTING IT

In this exercise, as discussed in Section 1.1, you might have had enriched experiences on your field visits and placement programs in some institutions/ organizations in consultation with their course teacher/s. Also, you might have dealt with individual cases, called a "case study" to study them from a social-psychological perspective. You would have surely exercised the required precautions while dealing with the cases as discussed in the previous section. Now here you have a final exercise, in which you are expected to submit two detailed case study reports as per your syllabus based on the work they have done.

Keeping these general guidelines in mind, you will have to submit your case study reports based on the work you have done. For submitting these reports, you will require a format or a structure following which you have to complete this exercise. You are provided here with a format/structure, that will give you an idea about what are the points that should be covered while writing case study reports. By maintaining the same structure and guidelines provided for writing case study reports, you can have some freedom in writing your reports.

Before you start writing your case study reports following the format or structure provided to you, you must remember that you are a student of psychology and have some precautions while writing the reports. A few guidelines for the same are as follows which can be considered as **DOs and DON'Ts**:

- Do not write the reports just for the sake of completing the activity for good marks in your undertaken academic course.
- Write your reports with a neutral and objective perspective, that is do not write the reports in such a way that they will reflect your excessive positive emotions/feelings like excitement or excessive

negative emotions/feelings like disappointment. Your report should be a mere objective description of the case.

- Use your **creativity** in writing the reports **sensitively**.
- Avoid the use of metaphors to describe any situation, unless it is required.
- Avoid mentioning the confidential information shared by the participants which they might have shared with you with trust. If it is essential to mention in your case studies reports to support your observation, report it carefully and sensitively.
- Let your reports reflect the originality. Use your own observations to write the report wisely which will reflect your understanding of the case.
- Strictly avoid copying others' reports or any unique elements of their reports as your own as it will reflect plagiarism which gives a bad impression of your work as well as your attitude towards academic activities.
- Take the exercise positively and take it as an opportunity to develop your observations, abilities, understanding, perspectives, attitudes, and sensitivity about the social incidents/places/problems that you study and describe them in a sensitive manner.
- There is no such word limit for writing the reports, but based on the structure provided to you and the content that you choose to write, it should be up to approximately 2 to 3 pages (including the introduction to the problem situation).

Table 1.1 Format/Structure for writing case studies

- **Introduction to Problem Situation**: Background information on Problem Situation being studied (About 1 to 1 and a half page).
- **Name of the Participant**:
- **Age/Sex of the Participant**:
- **Occupation**:
- **Type of Case**: (For example, student, elderly, alcoholic, etc.)
- **Problem situation studied**: (For example, study-related difficulties, health-related, etc.)
- **Nature of the problem situation**:

Discuss in one or two paragraphs, as required. For example, when the problem started (age of the participant and/or any particular year), what is the current status of the problem situation, etc.

- **Other related problems experienced by the participant due to the problem situation**:

For example, did the person experience face any negativity in his or her surroundings (maybe at the workplace, family, friend circle, etc.)? What are the emotions that he or she experienced/ or is experiencing during the phase of the problem situation?

- **How was the problem situation dealt with?**

Describe the efforts taken by the participant to deal with his or her problem situation, if any. For example, Did the person approach any informal (family, relatives, friends) or formal (psychologists, social workers, etc.) help to deal with the situation? Did the person receive any help or social support from any informal or formal sources?

- **Your observations about the case/participant (in brief)**:

Note down your own observations here in sufficiently required paragraphs. If there is nothing that you have observed anything particular, you can write "NIL".

These observations could be about the participants' nature/ personality aspects (e.g. reserved, open-minded, talkative, etc.), behaviour (e.g., friendly, tantrum, etc.), and whether you see any connection between these observed facts and the person's problem situation.

Use neutral language for noting down your observations. Avoid using harsh/ too good language which may create a very negative/ positive impression about the participants, which may not be true about the participants.

Remember that based on this structure provided for case study reports, your list of questions should be strictly shorter as discussed in Section 1.1.2, considering the time factor. It is also because this is your learning experience, and therefore it is suggested that you should not be entering the depth, which may cause any inconvenience to anyone, especially to the participants.

1.3 SUMMARY

We learned about field visits and placements in detail. Section 1.1.1 described what is field visits and placement, how they are arranged and scheduled, and what are their advantages and shortcomings. Then, we had a look at some challenges that may arise while arranging field visits and placements. We also had a glance at a few possibilities regarding why arranging field visits and placements would be difficult at all in some situations.

In Section 1.1.2, we learned about case studies in terms of how to conduct them and how to report them. We saw the different aspects in detail that

should be considered while conducting the case studies and reporting them.

The next Section 1.2 described the format or structure to guide you about how to write the case studies that you worked on during your field visits and placements.

1.4 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the field visits and placements in detail.
2. Discuss case studies in detail in terms of how to conduct and report them.
3. Write short notes:

a) Advantages and shortcomings of the field visits and placements

b) Challenges while arranging the field visits and placements

c) Conducting case studies

d) Reporting case studies

1.5 REFERENCES

- NA. (1998). Structured experiences, role plays, case studies, simulations and games at Pfeiffer and Company. *The Pfeiffer Library Volume 21*, Second edition. Retrieved from http://home.snu.edu/~jsmith/library/body/v21.pdf
- Cummins, A., McCloskey, S., O'Shea, M., O'Sullivan, B., Whooley, K., & Savage, E. (2010). Field visit placements: An integrated and community approach to learning in children's nursing. *Nurse Education in Practice*, *10*(2), 108-112. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.nepr.2009.04.004.

*****

2

ACTION RESEARCH

Unit Structure

2.0 OBJECTIVES

- To understand what is action research.
- To understand how to formulate the action plan with a detailed proposal.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

There have been several debates about action research, even in the present era. However, action research is recognized today as a valid form of enquiry with its own methodologies and epistemologies, and its own criteria and standards of judgement. Debates that take place are about the nature of action research, the methodology used by people for carrying out their research and their purposes for research (McNiff in McNiff & Whitehead, 2002).

As a part of the academic course that you have undertaken, you will need to take up action research which should aim to contribute to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation. Also, you will need to formulate the action plan regarding the action research and submit a detailed proposal accordingly. In this unit, we are going to learn in detail about – what is action research and how to formulate a research proposal for action research. We will also have a look at the different aspects involved in it.

2.1.1 Action Research:

The idea of action research refers to the theoretical framework, which guides practice. Hence, action research is often referred to as practitioner research, or practitioner-led or practitioner-based research, since it is done by practitioners working in any context. The position and status of the

practitioners do not matter in the case of action research. Thus, it can also be called a kind of self-reflective practice, because it involves one to think carefully about what he or she is doing.

Action research is always related to learning, which is related to education and growth. Hence, action research is also considered to be a form of educational research. It is carried out in a variety of fields, including social and caring sciences, education, organization and administration studies, and management. The term action research always implies a process of people interacting with one another.

Action researchers are believed to share certain sets of beliefs, commitments, and hopes. Hence, the action research carried out by them is a set of practices that demonstrates those beliefs, commitments, and hopes in practice. Thus, action researchers undertake the research to help them learn how to create social hope (Rorty, 1999) and to take action to try to realize hope in terms of social evolution. Thus, action research mainly aims at the generation of knowledge that leads to the improvement of understanding and experience for social benefit.

Some of the key theorists in action research are John Collier, Kurt Lewin, Lawrence Stenhouse, Stephen Kemmis, and John Elliott. Action research has significant potential for human betterment. It stands for the realization of human needs towards autonomy, loving relationships, and productive work, the urge towards freedom, creativity and self-recreation. The political counterpart of action research is liberal democracy, while its spiritual counterpart is a sense of unity between the self and the cosmos.

What is action research?

McNiff (in McNiff & Whitehead, 2002) saw action research not as a set of concrete steps, but as a process of learning from experience, a dialectical interaction between practice, reflection, and learning. He saw the link between action research and the creation of good order. McNiff describes action research as follows, which explains why action research is called so:

"Action research is a name given to a particular way of researching your own learning. It is a practical way of looking at your practice in order to check whether it is as you feel it should be. If you feel that your practice is satisfactory, you will be able to explain how and why you believe this is the case; you will be able to produce evidence to support your claims. If you feel that your practice needs attention in some way, you will be able to take action to improve it, and then produce evidence to show in what way the practice has improved."

Overall, action research is said to be an enquiry by the self into the self, undertaken in companionship with others, who are acting as research participants and critical learning partners. The most important thing is that the discussion about action research takes place within the real-life experience of real-life people.

Table 2.1: Major differences between Action Research and Traditional/Empirical Research

Action Research	Traditional/Empirical Research
Researchers do research on themselves in companionship with other people, and those others are doing the same.	Researchers carry out research on other people.
Researchers enquire into their own lives.	Researchers enquire into other people's lives.
Researchers speak with other people as colleagues.	Researchers speak about other people as data.

{**Source**: McNiff, J., & Whitehead, J. (2002). Action research: Principles and practice (Second Edition). London, New York: Routledge, Falmer, Taylor & Francis Group.}

Thus, as mentioned above, the idea of self-reflection is central to the action research. There is no distinction made between the researcher and the practitioner. Practitioners are potential researchers, and researchers are practitioners.

How to do Action Research?

Planning and undertaking action research means asking questions about what and why we are doing it, and how we can evaluate our practice in terms of the values we hold. Action research is practical, for which McNiff (in McNiff & Whitehead, 2002) offers some practical advice about Dos and Don'ts to be followed in action research. They are as follows:

Stay small and stay focused:

There can be a big difference between the scope of our work and the scope of our action research project. Therefore, we should not try to research everything at once. We need to focus on one issue and get inside into it to understand it by putting other issues on hold. This helps us understand the nature and process of our own learning.

Identify a clear research question:

While conducting action research, we need to be reasonably clear about what we are researching. Action research asks questions of the kind "**How do I…..?**", which emphasizes that we are at the centre of our research. Examples of such questions are "How do I improve the quality of my relationship with my colleague?", "How do I manage my time more efficiently?"

Be realistic about what you can do and be aware that wider change begins with you:

While conducting action research we should be aware that we cannot change the world immediately. We can make changes only on our part and influence others to make changes on their part.

Plan carefully:

It refers to having a broad outline of where we hope the research will lead. It does not refer to setting specific objectives. It is because sometimes we may need to shift our focus and change the research questions, as often the research may develop in unexpected ways.

Set a realistic timescale:

As action researchers, we should aim to set time limits that are realistic enough to cope with unpredictability. Setting the two time limits is useful. The first time limit should be ideal that we might potentially achieve, while the second one should be more generous which we must achieve. This will reflect that we are managing our research project appropriately and efficiently.

Involve others:

It is important to involve others in our action research in different roles, such as research participants, observers, validators, and potential researchers. There are two reasons for this. The first reason is that we are always in companionship with others as social beings. The second reason is that action research is always research with someone, not research on someone (Rowan & Reason, 1981).

Ensure good ethical practice:

Widely accepted aspects of doing ethically informed research include aspects like negotiating access with authorities, participants, parents/guardians, and supervisors; promising confidentiality of information, identity, and data; ensuring participants' rights to withdraw from the research, keeping others informed, maintaining our own intellectual property rights as researchers, and keeping good faith (See Robson, 1993; McNiff et al., 1996).

Concentrate on learning, not on the outcomes of action:

As action researchers, we should aim to show the process of learning that informed the activities, why we did what we did, and what we hoped to achieve. We should not focus on activity only and produce a report that offers descriptions of the activity, that is what we did and how we did it. Instead, we should think about – how we understand what we are doing in our practice, how we can develop it in new and better ways, actions we took to implement our ideas and to test their effectiveness by gathering, presenting and interpreting data, and how those actions influenced and inspired the actions of others.

Focus on yourself in company with others in research:

Action research should be carried out more like a self-study, where we should observe ourselves as researchers. We should speak on our own behalf and encourage others to do the same rather than observing what others are doing and speaking on their behalf.

Beware of happy endings:

As action researchers, we should start from where we are with a sense that something needs to be done, even if that someone is thinking carefully about where they are. We need to be aware that we are changing our own present realities in the creative process, so that our vision of where we want to be is also changing. Thus, we create the future as we change the present.

Be aware of political issues:

Action research is always political, since it aims to influence people to change their situations. As action researchers, we undertake self-study to see how we can recreate ourselves in order to help others to recreate themselves. We also make our own decisions about who we are, who we want to be, and what we intend to do.

Data Gathering and Drawing Conclusions from Data in Action Research:

According to McNiff (in McNiff & Whitehead, 2002), action research is a form of practice that involves data gathering, reflection on the action as it is presented through the data, generating evidence from the data, and making claims to knowledge based on conclusions drawn from validated evidence.

In action research, data refers to information, and we systematically monitor what we are doing in order to gather information about it. We then organize the obtained data in a variety of suitable ways, reflect on it, draw conclusions from it, and present those conclusions with the data for the critical analysis of others. Thus, we aim to make an original claim as action researchers that we know something that was not known before.

Action research follows an action-reflection cycle as an organizing framework for making sense of the data. This cycle involves the following steps. Let us understand these steps one by one.

Identifying a concern: It refers to what is our concern, which issue we are attending to, and whether we can gather information about it.

Initial stage of action research:

At the initial stage of action research, we need to make decisions about what we can and cannot do in the given situation in which we are working. This stage involves strategic planning and recognition of the social conditions which has possibly inspired and led us to work actively in that

particular situation (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). So before beginning the action research, researchers need to ask themselves two questions. First, "**What is to be done?**" (initial question), and second, "**What can be done?**" (i.e., "How can it be done?" or "What can be done in order to do what has to be done?" - strategic question). Here, the initial question will help us to begin the action research, while the strategic question will help us to recognize our limitations as well as potentialities.

Appropriateness and inappropriateness of action research:

Action research approaches are appropriate for issues that are related to values and how these values can be realized in practice. On the other hand, they are not appropriate for issues which aim to show the relationship between variables. The following examples will make clear what are some issues for which action research approaches are appropriate and issues for which they are inappropriate. Let us have a look -

Examples of issues for which action research approaches are appropriate	- I would like to improve the quality of relationships in my workplace. What can I do? - I would like to introduce ICT into my classrooms. How can I show the link between ICT and the quality of learning? - Why the low beginning for the annual party? - How can I arrange for the freer dissemination of ideas among the staff?
Examples of issues for which action research approaches are inappropriate	- What is the link between children's socio-economic status and their enjoyment of literature? - What do people think about the president? - How does management style relate to productivity? - How many customers visit the store on Saturday morning?

Thus, the above examples clearly indicate that as the name suggests, action research is appropriate for the issues wherein as researchers, we think of our active role in terms of **what we can do**/what action or step we can take, **how we can do** it to bring about necessary or significant changes in the present situation in order to make the situation better, and **why we want to do** it.

In other words, it is not appropriate for the issues wherein we as researchers are passively looking for some kind of relationship that may exist between two variables or sort of prevalence of some existing things as suggested in the above examples. That is, action research does not focus

on or emphasize any relationship or links or research questions like "How many..?", "What do others think/do/interested in?", etc.

1) **Imagining a solution**: This step refers to what solutions we can imagine, how we are going to gather the data, and which techniques we can use.

Techniques for gathering data:

Data collection techniques are categorized into three broad categories, namely, paper and pen techniques, live techniques and ostensive techniques. A brief description of the sub-techniques included in each of these categories has been presented below:

i) **Paper and Pen Techniques:** They include field notes, diaries and logs, reports, and questionnaires

Field notes:	- They are the notes of the situation 'in the field' (e.g., workplace, bus queue, classroom, home, etc.) as important instances of critical incidents. - Significant aspects of the action are documented using this technique. - For example - Two colleagues had a difference of opinion today. I set up a mediating strategy to avoid further confrontation. Both colleagues left the meeting still upset. But at least they prepared for not making a wider issue of it.
Diaries and logs:	- In this technique, we aim to keep our own diary and encourage other research participants for the same. - The diary is divided into two columns, namely, "What I did" and "What I learned" - The "**What I did**" column indicates the action taken by us, while the "**What I learned**" column indicates the reflection on that action. - We should reassure invited participants that their diaries are kept confidential and that they need not make their diaries available to us. - In this diary, we can document how our perceptions changed over time, which will indicate how we used new learning to help make better sense of a situation.
Reports:	- Reports can be in the form of accounts, letters,

	memos, etc. - For example, we can ask people to write a letter to us describing how they saw the situation and how they felt about it. - Archives of such reports over time can help us to keep track of the actions of our own as well as of other people, and see how issues and opinions changed over time.
Questionnaires:	- They should be used only if it is a must. - Though they are helpful, they are difficult to construct. - They are also likely to be misused. - They can be used to get an idea of trends. Open-ended questions often provide richer data than closed questions. - Using more qualitative forms is often necessary to see whether values are being lived in practice. - Data analysis is more labour and time-demanding.

ii) Live Techniques: They include sociometric methods, and interviews and discussions.

Sociometric methods:	- They are much used in sociological analysis, where social relationships are captured using diagrams to show interactions. - They might provide initial information and perhaps motivate us to investigate the situation further.
Interviews and discussions:	- They are valuable sources of data and capture the lived response of people to the situation. - Like questionnaires, they are also time and labour-demanding. - In order to show general conclusions, we may need to do some analysis of the discussion to indicate trends, as well as draw up a report. - Tape-recording and transcribing the conversations probably would be the best in this technique. - Like questionnaires, adopting an open-ended approach is the best in interviews.

	- It is important to refine our interviewing and counselling skills for using this technique. - Also, it is important to conduct interviews with care and consideration for the interview.

iii) Ostensive Techniques: They include stills presentations, audiotaped interviews, and videotape.

Stills presentations:	- They include the use of slide/tape presentations and software packages like PowerPoint. - Though they can be attractive, they can be limiting in what they portray. - Photographs and commentaries can be very useful in this technique to show changes in actions, but not changes in attitudes (see Schratz, 1998; Schratz & Steiner- Löffler, 1998).
Audiotaped interviews:	- The drawback of this technique is that it requires a lot of effort and time. - We need to put a huge effort to get what we are looking for. - Audiotapes must be transcribed in whole or part, and transcribing is a very lengthy process, which is time-consuming. - Also, while submitting the report, we should also aim to present the tape itself (probably in an archive or appendix), even if we submit the transcript, in whole or part.
Videotape:	- This is the most powerful medium to show the reality of situations. - It includes the use of other technology, such as digital cameras, multimedia presentations, hypertext, etc. - While using this method, it is very important to seek permission from participants before tape-recording their responses, especially with children. - We should remember that seeking permission from the participants is an important issue of freedom of information and potential litigation.

2) Implementing the solution:

This refers to how we can implement the solution, how we monitor the action, and how we observe and describe what is happening. Here, monitoring the action means monitoring the practice of ourselves and others as our own practice impacts them. In action research, we research ourselves, not others, but we also research how we influence others.

Monitoring our own action	- This involves keeping records of our own thoughts as they relate to our original intentions and purposes. - Monitoring action is part of evaluating whether we are achieving what we set out to do and whether we need to act in different ways to achieve it. - This can be done by – keeping a research diary, systematically writing up our activities and reflections, noting shifts in emphasis (if any), generating data by inviting others to monitor our actions, or inviting a colleague to observe us and offer feedback.
Monitoring other people's action	- We can monitor other people's actions and thoughts, who become participants in our research, with their permission, especially in the case of vulnerable participants, like children. - For this purpose, we can invite them to keep research diaries themselves and request them to make those diaries available to us. - We also need to check that all explanations are reasonably in agreement when we monitor others or invite others to monitor themselves. - For example, if we are investigating how we could improve the quality of learning of students, we can monitor the students' learning to see whether we are making the impact we wish.
Sorting the data:	- Starting to sort the obtained data as soon as possible for us is also important. - This helps us to make sense of the project in an ongoing way. - Here, we need to decide first on the initial categories and sort the data into those categories. - We may also want to devise new categories as we progress in our research.

3) Observe the influence and evaluate the outcomes:

This refers to how we will evaluate the solution, how we will make sense of the data in terms of success criteria, and what our claim to knowledge will look like. We should aim to involve others as critical friends and validators throughout our research project. We should also aim to assemble a validation group at critical points throughout our research to scrutinize our data, listen to our findings, and agree (or not) that we have a right to make our claim to knowledge.

This validation group also makes suggestions to us about how we might refine our work or make it more rigorous. Thus, in action research, we evaluate the outcome with the hope of showing our influence on other people's lives. We need to show the line of influence between what we believe in and whether those values influence good in other people's lives.

4) Modify actions and ideas in the light of evaluation, and plan for the next step:

This final step refers to how we will modify our actions and ideas in the light of evaluation, and how we will practice in order to influence others and our situations. At this stage of the action-reflection cycle, we perform an action at a wider level of social perspective.

Our wider commitment is towards creating good social order when we initially aim to improve our understanding in order to improve a local situation. Thus, here we need to encourage others to see the potential value of studying their own practice to help one another. This way, all are committed to improving their practice for mutual benefit. In other words, we plan for the next step for good social order by evaluating the outcomes of the research conducted to improve a local situation.

Validation of Action Research:

Research is a means through which we can claim that we now know more than what we did since we have undertaken research. Since it is aimed to advance knowledge, it also requires to undergo a validation process. This validation process requires people to agree to what we say as believable. Often, research that demonstrates causal relationships is regarded as good scientific research. On the other hand, research rooted in personal knowing is regarded as unscientific. Hence, practitioners need to provide supporting evidence for their claim that they have improved their practice.

Action research can be considered a disciplined enquiry, where practitioners systematically investigate how to improve practice and produce evidence for the critical examination of others to show how the practice can be judged to have improved. In this validation process, practitioners explain what they hoped to achieve and how they feel about what and how they have achieved it by pointing to critical instances from the data that can be regarded as evidence. They further explain how they generate their own theories of practice, and that the process of theorizing

is an ongoing dialectical engagement with inherently unpredictable problems.

There are three categories of validation of knowledge obtained through action research:

i)Self-validation	- Validation of knowledge is done by self. - We interrogate the assumptions underlying our own thinking. - We also check that we are speaking out of the values of respect for others and the need to see each point of view as worthy. - We respect the right to hold opinions – of ourselves as well as others.
ii)Colleagues' validation	- Validation of knowledge can be done by colleagues, who can be critical friends and/or a validation group. - Critical friends need to be supportive, but not to the extent that they do not point out real or potential flaws. - A commitment of the validation group is to meet us regularly, for example, every six weeks, and offer us feedback on our research. - We may ask the members of the validation group to consider questions, such as – i) Is the report a valid description of an educational process? ii) Does the evidence support the claims that we are making? iii) Can the members see instances where we are living out our stated values? - Apart from this, we can invite suggestions from the validation group members regarding how our research might be modified and strengthened.
iii)Academic validation	- Validation of knowledge is done by the academy as it is the highest authority in legitimate knowledge. - Also, criteria and standards of judgement used by the academy tend to have technical rationality. - Therefore our research work should have academic rigour and it should demonstrate internal methodological consistency to avoid our work from

	being rejected on technical grounds.

According to Habermas (1979), the following are the criteria which are required to judge the legitimacy of knowledge claims:

- A statement is true;
- the speech act is comprehensible;
- the speaker is authentic; and
- the situation is appropriate for the things to be said.

Also, we need to agree on the following points, when we invite people to judge the validity of our claims of knowledge:

- What we say about our practice is true;
- we use words and expressions that we all understand;
- we are sincere and avoid any deception; and
- the situation is right for us to discuss this issue.

There are two sets of dilemmas related to judging action research reports, which are interlinked. They are as follows:

- The first dilemma is related to whether action research reports should be judged in terms of traditional research;
- The second dilemma is related to the kinds of criteria set to judge action research reports.

Action research reports are judged by criteria set by the audience who are scrutinizing them. For example, work in the business context will be judged in terms of a marketplace philosophy, while work judged by a traditional academic audience will be judged in terms of normative academic standards.

This research practice has been usually traditionally judged in terms of accepted theoretical concepts, such as replicability and generalizability, or the inclusion of a literature review in a report. However, nowadays action research is recognized as a legitimate research methodology in its own right. Therefore, previous criteria, such as replicability and generalizability are no longer seen as appropriate for action research. Also, new criteria about how action research reports are being established.

Richard Winters (1989, p. 43) has suggested new kinds of criteria for assessing action research reports. According to him, research reports should demonstrate the following six principles:

- It should offer a reflective critique in which the author shows that they have reflected on their work and generated new research questions.

- It should offer a dialectical critique that subjects all given phenomena to critique, recognizing their inherent tendency to change.
- It should be a collaborative resource in which people act and learn as participants.
- It should accept risk as an inevitable aspect of creative practice.
- It should demonstrate a plural that accommodates a multiplicity of viewpoints.
- It should show the transformation and harmonious relationship between theory and practice.

Action research reports also can be judged in terms of whether the researchers show that they offer any explanations rather than only observations and descriptions of practice by living out their declared values (Whitehead, 2000).

Success criteria for action research are important from a methodological perspective for the following reasons:

- These criteria establish a record of how one proposes to carry out a project.
- They are a standard by which the success of a project can be evaluated.
- They become a syllabus for action, because they help one visualize in advance what is needed in order to achieve the aims of the project.
- They make the project public. They provide a kind of mission statement for the parties involved which imposes discipline on the project. There is a sense of shared responsibility for the success of the project.

Benefits of Action Research:

Based on the opinions of Muimhneacháin (in McNiff & Whitehead, 2002) about his own experiences, action research has significant implications for us as researchers, personally as well as professionally. These implications are as follows which can be considered benefits:

- Action research moves us to respect the opinions of others.
- It drives us to promote a learning environment and negotiate a learning agenda which is not set, but is capable of being responsive and democratic.
- It makes us integrate all learning experiences in a meaningful way.
- It makes us increasingly aware of the dialogical and unpredictable nature of learning – of ourselves as well as others.

- It provides us insight into how we had to adapt our practice according to the wider social and political situation.
- It helps us understand that change and integrating theory and practice involve complex and contradictory processes.
- Traditional ways of doing research offer us a finished picture to stand back and admire, while action research practice offers us a picture of our present action as a developmental and vibrant one with an evolving representation of our life story in each stroke.
- An experience of action research offers us the confidence and reassurance to continue our life work as a progress of becoming someone.

According to McDermott (in McNiff & Whitehead, 2002), an attitude to the enquiry that is reflective, reflexive and sceptical puts many taken-for-granted assumptions about research under pressure and results in a form of research that is creative and directed towards human flourishing.

Since you have undertaken the master's course in Social Psychology, considering the overall characteristics of action research, one of the apt, influential and revolutionary examples of action research that can be thought of in the field of education is the work of Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule, which led to a massive social change. Despite several challenges, Jotirao Phule constantly asked himself questions like, "What can I do to improve the situation of socio-economically marginalized people?", "What can I do and cannot do to improve their situation?", "How can I improve their situation?", "Why is it required to improve their situation?" So his thoughts regarding this situation were continuously evolving in nature. These and several other questions led him to unite with other people who shared the same thoughts, opinions and ideologies and became research participants. Thus, these people thought of their active role in doing something for societal benefit, rather than merely passively finding out the relationship between the things which might be already existing. They kept evaluating their own practice, its outcomes along with their actions and the influence of their work on the education of marginalized people. This also led to yet another important outcome in terms of the education of girls and women. Thus, as practitioners in the field of education, they constantly evaluated their own practice and kept validating their practice against several existing criteria and their action research led to a huge impact on the education of the poor marginalized people, girls and women, and the overall national social scenario. Though they might have used lesser techniques as mentioned before, with available resources, their work had a powerful impact during that period and still continued further on a massive scale. Thus, their work had a great contribution in the area of education, which benefited society also. Not only this, but we will find ample of such great examples of action research in Indian history, and even in world history.

Summing up the action research, the potential for personal practice lies in the overall research question for our life work – "How do I contribute to the development of a good social order through education?" Also, as we have seen right from the beginning, definitions of action research emphasize that it is meant to bring social change and this social change begins in individuals' minds. Accordingly, the first place to start this social change is our own life as researchers.

2.1.2 Action Plan and Research Proposal:

Before understanding what is the action plan and research proposal, and why they are required, first, we need to have a brief look at the background, which will make the further things clear.

We all learned about action research and its importance in the previous section. We are also aware that research is the scientific way to reach the solution to existing problems in the present environment and society as a whole. Research paves the way for development and advancement. Hence, research has become a very important aspect of human life. Many countries promote research and invest their resources in it to promote innovations for advancing and promoting their growth. They also encourage many of their institutions affiliated with different fields to involve actively in the research.

In line with this, many institutions also came up with the objective to promote and govern research activities by motivating them through funding, considering the need for more research work and the huge expenditure involved in the big ambitious projects. Examples of such research-promoting and funding institutions are the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) and the University Grant Commission (UGC) in India, and Babasaheb Ambedkar Research and Training Institute (BARTI) in Pune, Maharashtra. Many academic institutions have their internal research governing body, such as the Research Review Committee (RRC) run by the Research Administration and Promotion Cell at the University of Mumbai. Such university-level institutes promote doctoral and post-doctoral research studies in the various disciplinary departments of the university and manage the administration of such research-related activities.

What is the action plan and the proposal?

The action plan of any research study, as it suggests, is a rough plot of the actions planned right from the beginning till the end of the research project to be undertaken. It mainly emphasizes the methodology part of the research. In other words, the action plan describes how the undertaken research will be carried out and what required steps will be included in it. It is a part of the research proposal that we need to submit for getting our research study/project approved to be carried out.

On the other hand, a research proposal or proposal is putting forward an idea about a research study that one is interested in carrying out along with the action plan. Such research proposals are prepared to seek approval

from research governing bodies. For this purpose, researchers need to highlight the importance of the study in the present era and why the particular area and/or topic has been chosen. Thus, a research proposal is a miniature of what has been planned in the research to be undertaken with all the required details, excluding results, findings and conclusion of the study that are yet to be derived.

Let us understand the background of why such action plans and research proposals are required to be submitted.

Why is the action plan and the proposal required?

Many independent researchers and research-focused institutions are interested in undertaking aspiring research projects to make a significant contribution to their respective fields. This makes them gain recognition through their research and contribution to social welfare. However, undertaking big research projects is not an easy task. It requires a lot of constant sincere effort and may involve huge human and other resources for managing different tasks involved in it. It also requires a big budget to manage the expenditure, especially when international-level projects are undertaken.

A big expenditure required for such aspiring research projects may be beyond the capability of institutions at times. Hence, institutions undertaking such projects may require financial aid through funding from research funding institutions. Another benefit of seeking help from such institutions is that the research project also gets recognized when it gets approved by such reputed institutions. Thus, it serves as a dual motivation for researchers. Therefore, considering both the benefits, researchers often involve in aspiring projects and strive to get their projects approved by such funding institutions.

These funding institutions, as mentioned before, for example, ICSSR, BARTI, etc. often support individual doctorate research from various academic institutions also, through several fellowships announced for doctoral/ post-doctoral research studies. Thus, hundreds of doctoral and post-doctoral researchers also apply to seek these fellowships, so that their research studies also get recognized as approved by these institutions and their research study also will get funded through such fellowships to manage the expenditure involved in completing research activities, if approved.

However, it is again not an easy task to get our research project approved by such research funding agencies/institutions. There is a lot of competition between a large number of research projects every year, short-term as well as long-term, striving to seek approval, because such funding institutions can offer funding only to a limited number of promising projects by investing a good amount of money with them, rather than spending big amount in a large number of studies. For this reason, the research funding institutions may consider the following criteria to approve the research proposals of the research projects:

- Whether the aspiring research project is really aspiring? Is there something novel in the research content?
- Does it have the potential to contribute to the related field and overall societal benefit and welfare?
- Do the researchers have a good amount of knowledge about their research area and research methodology in general?
- Do they have a valid rationale for conducting that particular research project?
- Is it worth funding the research project?

Apart from these criteria, there may be some other criteria that institutions may consider. Considering these all things, researchers need to submit their research proposal with their action plans and estimated budget required for their research project/study. The details about the project included in the proposal should be very clear, especially the rationale and significance of the study, and methodology that will be used.

Section 2.2 will help you understand the way you should submit your action plan with a detailed research proposal.

2.2 EXERCISE TO PERFORM: FORMULATING THE ACTION PLAN WITH DETAILED PROPOSAL

In the third year of the BA course, you might have undertaken research projects as a part of the syllabus. If you have not dealt with it before for some reason, no need to worry! You can still find information here on the structure of the research from the introduction to the references.

With more or less difference (excluding some major sections for which proposed research needs to take place), the same format or structure you will have to follow for submitting the detailed proposal of the action plan of your action research. We are providing here with the structure that you can follow.

In the previous section, we have seen the major difference between action research and traditional research. Considering those differences and the characteristics of action research, you might have gained clarity that action research can be more conducted at the personal level focusing on our own learning process, where we try to study our own practice-related issues in the company with those people who are in the same field as ours. Hence, it is comparatively easy to conduct than traditional research with lesser expenditure. In this case, preparing and submitting a research proposal with an action plan may not be practically required or possible.

However, considering the content of your syllabus, we have presented the following example in a format/structure for the research proposal, combining the characteristics and content of both types of research, so that preparing the action plan with a research proposal sounds more logical.

This will help you to learn how to prepare a research proposal with an action plan when submitting it for approval and get our research funded by the funding institutions/agencies.

Some institutions also may provide their own prescribed format for researchers while inviting their applications for fellowships or funding. This helps researchers to understand what information is expected by the institutions and to prepare their research proposal accordingly. However, here is a general format/structure (Table 2.2) provided to you which can be considered if no such prescribed format is provided by the funding institutions. It provides only general guidelines regarding the structure with a hypothetical example. Accordingly, you may prepare your research proposal more effectively. In other words, following it from word to word should not be considered and it is not expected. What is expected at this academic stage and onwards is referring to some research articles as a self-study mode for more clarity about the way your research should be documented. The different sections of the research proposal (after the content page) can be continued till the end or different sections can be presented on different pages, as guided in the following example or as the prescribed format which you might have been instructed to follow by the institution where you are conducting a research study and submitting it.

Table 2.2 Format/Structure for Research Proposal

- **Research Title** (For example, Effectiveness of Audiovisual Teaching Methods over Traditional Teaching Methods in Public/Private Schools – First page)
- **Author** (Researcher's name/s with other required details like institutional affiliation- First page)
- **Content** (with page numbers – Next page; Example provided in Table 2.3)
- **Introduction** (Starting from next page – about 4-5 pages or as required)

There is no such page/word limit when you actually document some research for your final dissertation or Ph.D. thesis or even at the non-academic/professional level. But since as of now you are just submitting an action plan for your research study, 4 to 5 pages will be enough, not going into depth.

The introduction part will include the overall description of the problem/variable that you have chosen to study. Thus, it will mainly include:

- A definition and description of the variable/s under study – in brief, or as required;
- Its nature (along with any associated problems, if any);
- Its prevalence – in the country where you will be conducting

research and globally (in short – previous research references can be cited);

- Categories of the problem/variable (if any – previous research studies can be cited);
- Different models developed related to the problem/variable, e.g., biological model, psycho-social model, etc. (if any – previous research studies can be cited)
- Solutions to the problem/various findings related to the variable (how the problem can be dealt with at different levels, e.g., psychological, biological, etc. – previous research studies can be cited)
- Any other points can be covered in the introduction which can make your proposal more effective.

- **Rationale of the study:**

Specify the reason/s behind why the particular problem has been chosen to study (this should be well explained, so that there are increased chances of getting your research proposal approved).

- **Significance of the study:**

Specify why the particular problem is so significant to study (this should be well explained, so that there are increased chances of getting your research proposal approved).

- **Problem** (Continuing from the next page till References):

The problem of the present research is to study the effectiveness of audiovisual teaching methods over traditional teaching methods in public/private schools.

- **Aim** :

The present research aimed to study the difference between the effectiveness of audiovisual teaching methods and traditional teaching methods.

- **Objectives:**

- To examine the difference between the effectiveness of audiovisual teaching methods and traditional teaching methods.
- (Some other objectives can be formed, if required, based on what you aim to study)

However, only major objectives can be specified in the research proposal, in case there are sub-objectives also.

- **Hypotheses/ Research Questions (Only either of them should be: stated.** This particular example shows the hypotheses**)**

- There will be a significant difference between the effectiveness of audiovisual teaching methods and traditional teaching methods.

- Audiovisual teaching methods will be more effective than the traditional teaching methods in _____ (private/public/both) schools.

(Such hypotheses can be stated differently based on the settings in which you are studying the problem – for example, the second hypothesis can be stated separately according to the type of method and type of school)

- (Some other hypotheses can be formed, if required, based on the aim and objectives of your study)

However, like objectives, only major hypotheses can be specified in the proposal in order to avoid unnecessary length.

An example of the research question could be –

How do I find out which teaching method is effective for private/public schools? (in terms of Action research)

Or

Which teaching method will be more effective for private/public schools? (in terms of Traditional research)

- **Literature Review/ Review of Literature:**

Previous research studies and their findings related to the variables (e.g., Type of teaching methods) that will be studied by you (about 1 or 2 pages or as required including the variables that will be studied, not going much in-depth).

- **Methodology:**

- *Design*

A _____ (factorial design/ t-test) was used.

- *Sample and sample size*

200 teachers of 5^{th} to 10^{th} Standard from 5 private and 5 public schools in Mumbai city

(Specify the population that will be studied along with their age range/group e.g., between ____ and _____ years, if required; number of participants _____ from _____ city, _____ state, _____ country, if applicable).

Note: The above example is hypothetical. Choose and state your

research sample and sample size carefully.

- *Sampling technique*

A _____ sampling method will be used for data collection (e.g., a snowball sampling method was used).

- *Operational Definitions of Variables* (Define independent/predictor variable, and dependent/criterion variable as they will be used. Also, specify control variables used if any, such as age, religion, etc.)

Independent Variable/s (One below the other, if more than one)*:*

Type of Teaching Methods: Two types of teaching methods will be studied –

i) Audiovisual method – Define the way it will be studied (specify its levels in terms of categories, if any).

ii) Traditional method – Define the way it will be studied (specify its levels in terms of categories, if any).

Dependent Variable/s (One below the other, if more than one): Effectiveness of teaching method - Define the way it will be studied (specify its levels in terms of categories, if any).

Control Variables (if any, One below the other, if more than one):

i) Age groups: _____ (specify, if any),

ii) Gender _____ (specify, if any),

- *Tools To be Used* (Meniton all tools that will be used for measuring specific variables one below the other along with their authors, brief description and their psychometric properties, that is reliability, validity, etc.)

1) Tool 1___Name of the tool___ (author, year): Mention the author, what the tool measures, the type and nature of the tool, a method to respond tool, what is its reliability – factor and sub-factor-wise, and its validity.

2) Mention the remaining tools that have been chosen to be used, in a similar way.

Tools can be self-constructed also for which psychometric properties should have been computed through a pilot study/ies.

- *Statistical Analysis of Data (Mention in brief)*:

1) Descriptive statistics – Total, mean, standard deviation

2) Inferential statistics – t-test (any other statistics, if applicable)

List down the statistical techniques used for data analysis

- **Analysis of Data (Write in detail):**

Mention the statistical techniques analysis that will be used, what they will compute and the reason behind using each technique.

- **Results:**

Here possible findings can be specified in brief (for example, expected directions of correlations between a few variables can be specified).

- Specify under the headings of **Discussion** and **Conclusion** that they will be specified based on the actual research findings.

- **References:**

References of the research studies that are used in the introduction, literature review and any other section, such as methodology.

To be written in the latest/running APA (American Psychological Association) style format edition or any other style format (MLA, Chicago, etc.) preferred by the institution you are undertaking the course.

- **Budget Required for the Present Research** (Can be specified on the fresh page)

The expected required budget should be expressed in a table form specifying the particulars of items and the amount required (Approximately – in Rupees/ currency of the respective country where research will take place).

- An example of the Proposed Budget has been provided below in Table 2.4:

Table 2.3 Example of Content Page

Sr. No.		**Page No.**
1	Introduction	3 – 7
2	Rationale of the study	….
3	Significance of the study	….
…	…….	…..
….	…….	…..
13	References	…..
14	Expected required budget	……

Table 2.4 A Hypothetical Example of Budget Required for the Present Research

Sr. No.	**Particulars of Items**	**Amount Required/ Approximate Expenditure (in Rupees)**
1	Psychological tools purchasing	50,000/-
2	Appointment of research assistants/field investigators (for data collection purposes)	2,00,000/-
3	Travelling (for data collection purposes)	75,000/-
4	Stationery	25,000/-
5	Statistical analysis software/ services	1,00,000/-
6	Printing/Xerox	30,000/-
7	Contingency	20,000/-
8	Miscellaneous	10,000/-
	Total (Approximate amount)	**5,00,000/-**

Important Notes:

1) Do not select a complicated topic for research at this academic level, but make sure that the topic is not very easy and too common.

2) Table 2.4 serves just as an example of what items can be covered in the expected budget. It may not match the needs of the proposal provided in the example (Table 2.2).

3) One should include only those items in the budget, which will be required to carry out the research project. So, budget forming should be done carefully.

4) Quote the expenditure only for those tools that are required for your research study and need to be purchased if they are not readily available.

5) Similarly, follow in the case of statistical analysis software/ services if not available with you or in your institution.

6) This is a regular format of proposing the budget, which is used universally. If it is an in-house research project that will be funded by the institution itself, you may also provide the expected range of

expenditure for each item if the institution allows, for example, Printing – 20,000/- to 30,000/-

7) Mostly, the proposed budget should include the major items of expenditure, in case the individual researchers or the research undertaking institutions can manage minor expenditures.

2.3 SUMMARY

In the first half of this unit, we learned about action research in as much detail as possible. Action research is recognized today as a valid form of enquiry with its own methodologies and epistemologies, and its own criteria and standards of judgement. action research is often referred to as practitioner research, or practitioner-led or practitioner-based research, since it is done by practitioners working in any context. It can also be called a kind of self-reflective practice, because it involves one to think carefully about what he or she is doing. Action research is always related to learning, which is related to education and growth. Hence, action research is also considered to be a form of educational research. The term action research always implies a process of people interacting with one another. Action research is said to be an enquiry by the self into the self, undertaken in companionship with others, who are acting as research participants and critical learning partners. It takes place within the real-life experience of real-life people.

We saw the major difference between action research and traditional research. We learned about Dos and Don'ts to be followed while carrying out action research. We learned about data gathering and concluding data in action research along with all the various steps and techniques required for it. We then discussed the validation process of the action research, which includes self-validation, colleagues' validation, and academic validation. We also discussed the various benefits of action research. We then moved toward the action plan and research proposal. In this section, we saw what is the action plan and research proposal, why they are required,

In the second half of the unit, we performed an exercise in which you were provided with the structure/format along with some guidelines for preparing the action plan with the research proposal for your research topic.

2.4 QUESTIONS

1. What is action research and how to do it? Explain in detail.
2. What are the Dos and Don'ts explained by McNiff to be followed while conducting action research?
3. Explain the action-reflection cycle along with its various steps followed by action research.

4. Write a detailed note on the validation of action research.
5. Write a detailed note on the action plan and research proposal.
6. Write short notes:

a) Dos and Don'ts in Action Research

b) Identifying a concern as a first stage of the action-reflection cycle

c) Imagining the solution as a second stage of the action-reflection cycle

d) Three categories of validation of knowledge

e) Benefits/implications of action research

f) Requirement of action plan and research

2.5 REFERENCES

- McNiff, J., & Whitehead, J. (2002). *Action research: Principles and practice* (Second Edition). London, New York: Routledge, Falmer, Taylor & Francis Group.

2.6 APPENDIX: POSSIBLE TOPICS FOR RESEARCH

Students, here the list of possible topics for action research has been provided for your ease. They are related to some social problems currently existing in our society. You can choose any one of these topics or you are free to choose any topic other than this of your choice.

- Job loss among youth
- Skill development among youth
- Life skill development among disabled people
- Financial management among aged people
- Improving self-esteem in women in the context of domestic violence
- Immediate concerns of teenagers' parents
- Immediate concerns of LGBTQ+
- Concerns of earning and non-earning women
- Challenges faced by the night-school students
- Challenges faced by the students learning through the distant mode
- Problems of drop-out students
- Consequences of exposure to technology among children below 5 years

Note: The same list can be referred to in the context of Unit 4 while dealing with the social experiment, if required.

*****

3

PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR – I

Unit Structure

3.0 OBJECTIVES

- To understand implicit consumer cognition.
- To know the subliminal presentation of stimuli and more overt priming effects.
- To study the nature and role of affect in consumer behaviour.
- To know the structure and assessment of affect.
- To understand the role of affect in consumer judgement and decision-making.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The advertising proved its universality in the daily life of consumers in 1957. Also, the advertisers were scheming to deprive consumers of their free will by advertising to the subconscious. James M. Vicary and Francis Thayer had announced that they presented messages such as “Eat popcorn” and “Drink Coca-Cola” for a duration of 1/3000th of a second, well below the threshold for conscious perception, during movie screenings. According to Vicary and Thayer, this subliminal persuasion technique increased popcorn sales by 57.5% and cola sales by 18.1%. Some unseen stimuli allegedly influenced consumers to buy more snacks at the movies.

The implications were so overwhelming that politicians also could use subliminal advertising to get elected; anyone who had enough money to subliminally advertise on television could make an unsuspecting public do their request. Even a suspecting public might be susceptible to subliminal advertising, since there would be no way to know whether advertisements were being played.

No advertising- or consumer-related claim has captured the public imagination quite like the notion that consumers can be persuaded outside of their conscious awareness to buy. Vance Packard's (1957) best-seller "The Hidden Persuaders", described immoral tricks used by marketing and advertising professionals designed to appeal to consumers' unconscious needs and desires. Published only two years later, Haber's (1959) survey of 324 San Franciscans revealed that 41% were aware of subliminal advertising, and 50% believed it to be unethical. Still, two-thirds of them were willing to watch a television program even if they knew that subliminal advertising was used in the commercials.

Surveys conducted more recently (Rogers & Smith, 1993; Synodinos, 1988; Zanot, Pincus, & Lamp, 1983) reveal that the public has substantially greater familiarity with subliminal advertising today. Between 74% and 82% of respondents (depending on the survey) claimed to have heard of subliminal advertising. Of those respondents who have heard of subliminal advertising, more than 99% believe that subliminal advertising is actually used and 44 to 48% of respondents believe that they may be susceptible to subliminal advertising.

The threat of subliminal advertising has not decreased. Instead, in the past 50 years the general public has become more aware and more suspicious of subliminal advertising. As described in greater depth later in this unit, public concern over the power of subliminal advertising is likely quite unfounded. Subliminal advertising, at best, is a very weak force. However, there is evidence that subliminally presented stimuli can influence affect, behaviour, and cognition. And subliminal stimulation is not the only way in which we can be influenced without awareness. Consumer-related affect, behaviour, and cognition can be and often are driven by forces that are entirely outside of conscious awareness.

3.2 IMPLICIT CONSUMER COGNITION

The application of prior knowledge to a task without conscious recall or awareness of the prior knowledge is a sign of implicit cognition (e.g., Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Khilstrom, 1990, 1999; Roediger, 1990; Schacter, 1987). A well-known illustration of implicit cognition can be observed in memory research. Compared to non-amnesiac control subjects, amnesiacs perform significantly less well on recall and recognition tasks when given a list of words to memorize.

Introspective access to memory does not appear to be present in amnesiacs. On the other hand, when given the same list of terms and then required to fill in a string of word stems or fragments (e.g., c_k_ or pep_,

the amnesiacs generate previously observed words almost at the same pace as the non-amnesiac. Essentially, the impact of past events on subsequent performance is almost the same for those with amnesia as for those without it; their implicit memory is equally as strong as that of control subjects without impairment (Warrington & Weiskrantz, 1970).

The unrecognized or misinterpreted influence of prior experiences on consumer-related judgment and behaviour is known as implicit consumer cognition. Different aspects of consumer cognition may be implicit. They are:

- consumers may not be aware of a biased stimulus (such as that seen in subliminal advertising);
- they may not be aware of the cognitive processes that mediate the relationship between a stimulus and an outcome; or
- they may not be aware of the outcome itself (Chartrand, 2005).

To what degree, however, are we uninformed of the influences and processes influencing consumer behaviour?

Decades of research have shown that explicit cognition has a consistent impact on consumer behaviour. Different models of human cognition have depicted people as –

- **naive scientists** (engaging in careful, semi-scientific attempts to understand the world around them),
- **cognitive misers** (having a limited cognitive capacity and generally unwilling to expend full cognitive effort), and
- **motivated tacticians** (having multiple processing strategies and employing them according to motivation and ability) (Fiske & Taylor, 1991).

Despite their differences, all of these models agree on the importance of explicit cognition. People process information deliberately and deliberately, and this often leads to correct decisions.

People who are both motivated and capable of carefully processing persuasive information, for example, tend to accept high-quality arguments and reject low-quality arguments in studies of attitude change (e.g., Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Of course, extensive cognitive elaboration is not required for persuasion. People can be persuaded by lightly processing peripheral cues (for example, an attractive model may elicit positive feelings toward a brand) or by invoking heuristics (for example, a highly credible source would only endorse a good product).

But, given our limited cognitive resources and the volume of stimuli we encounter on a daily basis, it is clearly impossible to devote even a small portion of our cognitive resources to all of the stimuli we encounter. We cannot always process information thoughtfully and methodically (Bargh,

1997; Kahneman & Triesman, 1984; Posner & Snyder, 1975; Schneider & Shiffrin, 1977). When we devote less attention or fewer cognitive resources to decisions, our performance can improve (e.g., Ambady, Hallahan, & Conner, 1999; Ambady & Rosenthal, 1992, 1993; Dijksterhuis, 2004). Indeed, our frequent inability to explain our own behaviour correctly (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977) speaks directly to the notion that we lack conscious awareness of many basic cognitive processes.

We should be able to explain how and why we do things if we are consciously aware of how and why we do them. In fact, we are so bad at explaining our own behaviour that attempting to do so frequently muddies the behaviour we are attempting to explain (Wilson & Kraft, 1993; Wilson & Schooler, 1991; Schooler, 2002; Schooler, Ohlsson, & Brooks, 1993). A non-stuttering research participant was induced to stutter via negative reinforcement in a remarkably compelling (if somewhat inhumane) example of our inability to make accurate attributions about our behaviour (Goldiamond, 1965). He received an electric shock while reading aloud, and the shock was only stopped when the participant stuttered. His stuttering rate was so high at the end of the session that he received no shocks at all. He returned to the lab two days later and stuttered so much that he was only shocked twice. When questioned about his stuttering, he blamed it on his anxiety. When asked directly whether the electric shock had any effect on his stuttering, he claimed that the shock had nothing to do with it. Outside of conscious awareness, cognition can occur (in this case, an awareness of the stuttering-shock contingency), and this cognition can have significant implications for our behaviour, including consumer behaviour.

A recent explosion of research on implicit cognition continues to reveal how mental processes that occur outside of conscious awareness can have a significant impact on judgment and behaviour. This unit is divided into two sections that review research and theory on implicit cognition as it relates to consumer behaviour. The first section discusses implicit measures of attitudes (other than the Implicit Association Test) affect, memory, and personality. The second section focuses on implicit processes and effects, such as subliminal persuasion and priming, consumer decision-making, and verbal overshadowing.

3.2.1 Implicit Measures:

Implicit measures assess respondents' stored information as well, but they do not require the respondent to intentionally retrieve the information. Instead, information about the respondent is derived from responses to tasks or questions that appear to have nothing to do with the respondents' psychological state (attitude, trait, and so on). The Thematic Apperception Test (TAT; Morgan & Murray, 1935) is a classic example of an implicit measure. The TAT is a projective test in which participants are shown a series of ambiguous images and asked to write a brief story about each one.

Trained coders then rate the story using predefined criteria, assigning the respondent a score on the dimension of interest (e.g., Need for Affiliation - Winter et al., 1998; attitudes toward union labour - Proshansky, 1948). Projective implicit measures are less favoured techniques due to concerns about their validity and reliability (Lemon, 1973; see Lundy, 1985; Winter & Stewart, 1977). Contemporary implicit measures rely more on the speed with which respondents can perform certain tasks, such as word categorization, or make word-non-word judgments (e.g., Dovidio, Kawakami, Johnson, Johnson, & Howard, 1997; Fazio, Jackson, Dunton, & Williams, 1995; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998). Two such measures are:

- The Implicit Association Test (see Perkins, na) and
- The evaluative priming paradigm (Fazio et al., 1995; Wittenbrink, in press).

Although both the response time-based measures and projective type measures can be implicit, they appear to require fundamentally different types of information processing.

Explicit measures are those which require the respondent to intentionally retrieve some stored information about himself or herself. Explicit attitude measures, such as Likert, Thurstone, or semantic differential measures, require respondents to retrieve previously stored evaluative information about a specific attitude object. Explicit measures of personality require respondents to indicate how well different trait words or behaviours describe them.

According to conventional wisdom, explicit measures are best used when respondents are willing and able to report on their psychological states. They are thought to work fine when used to assess attitudes or personality traits that respondents are consciously aware of and are not tainted by social desirability concerns. On the other hand, they are thought to be of very limited utility when the object under consideration is socially undesirable (e.g., prejudice – Crosby, Bromley, & Saxe, 1980; attitudes toward cheating – Corey, 1937). However, when people are unwilling or unable to report their true attitudes, conventional wisdom would advocate the use of implicit, or indirect, measures.

Baby matches a sound, indicating that they understand that “ah” comes from wide open lips and mouth corners pulled back (Kuhl & Meltzoff, 1982). This stage marks the start of the development of babies' receptive language, or their ability to understand what is said to or about them. Babies grow in their ability to do what you and I find difficult when listening to an unfamiliar language at seven months and beyond segment spoken sounds into individual words. Furthermore, their proficiency with this task, as measured by their listening patterns, predicts their language abilities between the ages of 2 and 5 (Newman et al., 2006).

3.2.2 Implicit Processes: Doing Without Understanding:

The focus of this section is on the applications of implicit cognition to consumer psychology. According to Chartrand's Model of Automatic Processes (2005, p. 203), factors that individuals, as consumers, can be unaware of –

(a) Environmental stimuli that may influence their behaviour,

(b) Automatic processes themselves that mediate behaviour, or

(c) The outcome of that automatic process, which includes "behaviour, motivation, judgments, decisions, and emotions".

Let us begin with a review of research on environmental influences that people are unaware of (for example, subliminal influences). After discussing automatic processes, we will also look at a few notes on outcome awareness. The intent is not to list all studies involving implicit processes and/or effects, but rather to provide an overview of the theoretical and empirical work being done in the various research areas.

Awareness of Environmental Stimuli: Subliminal Presentation of Stimuli, and More Overt Priming Effects:

Despite a little scientific doubt about the existence of unconscious mental activity, there are serious questions about subliminal perception and the types of effects it can have. There are a variety of problems with research involving the presentation of subliminal stimuli, but it is perhaps best to start with definitional issues and different usages of the term.

Subliminal stimuli (visual, auditory, or tactile) are those which are presented in such a way that they elicit no sensation in the respondent. Pratkanis and Greenwald (1988) classified subliminal stimuli into four categories –

- **subthreshold stimuli** or stimuli presented at energy levels too low to be detectable;
- **masked stimuli** or stimuli presented very quickly and immediately followed by another meaningless stimulus intended to interfere with perception;
- **unattended stimuli**, in which attention is drawn away from the critical stimulus; and
- **figurally transformed stimuli**, which include items that are blurred, decomposed, or otherwise distorted Because they evoke the limen, the first two categories fit a psychological definition of subliminal.

The threshold, also known as the limen, is the point at which a stimulus elicits a sensation. The most appropriate way to identify subliminal perception is to simply ask participants if they noticed the presentation of a stimulus (Cheesman & Merikle, 1986; Fowler, 1986; Greenwald, 1992; Kihlstrom, 1987; Merikle, 1988).

Kihlstrom (1999) proposed a distinction between explicit and implicit perception, similar to the distinction between implicit and explicit memory. The conscious awareness of some element in the environment, as well as the ability to report on that element, is referred to as explicit perception. Implicit perception is the perception that occurs without awareness and may include subliminal perceptions of stimuli.

A critical aspect of implicit perception is the inability to consciously report the presence of the stimuli. Subliminal means that respondents claim to be unable to see the stimulus. As Kihlstrom (1999) points out, this conceptualization also avoids another issue with defining subliminal perception, namely the limen. Of course, with this approach, one must still worry about respondents being truthful, but incentives can be used to increase respondents' motivation to be truthful.

Pratkanis and Aronson (1992) conducted a remarkably thorough review of over 150 mass media articles and over 200 academic papers and found no clear evidence in support of subliminal persuasion. Pratkanis (1992) cited the shortcomings of subliminal "the failure to control for subject expectancy and experimenter bias effects, selective reporting of positive over negative findings, lack of appropriate control treatments, internally inconsistent results, unreliable dependent measures, presentation of stimuli in a matter that is not truly subliminal, and multiple experimental confounds specific to each study". Other reviews of subliminal advertising have been more charitable, but still pessimistic about the long-term value of subliminal advertising.

According to Theus (1994), there is little evidence for the effects of subliminal advertising on brand choice behaviour, but other applications may be more fruitful. She recommends more research on the use of visual imagery as stimuli, recipient characteristics (for example, using messages that are relevant to the audience's needs, hopes, and desires), and the repetition of subliminal stimuli.

Despite the lack of evidence in favour of subliminal persuasion, there is a substantial amount of evidence demonstrating that subliminal presentation of stimuli can have an effect on the affects, cognition, and behaviour. Following the subliminal presentation of a semantically related prime, word-nonword judgments can be accelerated (e.g., priming bread facilitates recognition of butter; Balota, 1983; Fowler, Wolford, Slade, & Tassinary, 1981; Marcel, 1983).

The subliminal priming of trait words can also influence social judgments. Participants in a "vigilance task" in which words were presented subliminally were given to Bargh and Pietromonaco (1982). The concept of hostility was associated with zero, 20%, or 80% of the words. Following the vigilance task, participants read an ambiguous paragraph about a fictional character. Donald, a fictional character, was rated on a variety of dimensions. The higher the percentage of hostile words they had been exposed to, the lower their opinion of Donald was (see also Chen &

Bargh, 1997; Erdley & D'Agostino, 1988). Finally, we know that subliminal stimuli can influence attitudes.

Other lines of research have demonstrated consistent effects of subliminal priming on self-judgment and behaviour. For example, subliminal presentation of threatening stimuli has been shown to increase self-reported anxiety (Robles, Smith, Carver, & Wellens, 1987). Several studies have subliminally activated stereotypes and demonstrated behavioural assimilation to those stereotypes. Elderly participants subliminally exposed to words reflecting positive aspects of the elderly stereotype (e.g., wise) have been shown to walk faster (Hausdorff, Levy, & Wei, 1999) and have improved memory (Levy, 1996); however, elderly participants exposed to negative aspects of the elderly stereotype (e.g., senile) have shown worsened memory (Levy, 1996).

In simple language, subliminal persuasion is unlikely, and the effects of subliminal advertising are far from those suggested by Vicary. Subliminally presented stimuli can influence semantic, evaluative, and social judgments, as well as attitudes, behaviour, and the processing of seemingly unrelated information. In summary, the evidence to date suggests that subliminal stimuli can be used to evoke abstract concepts and affects, and that they can influence related judgments and behaviours where the primed concepts are reasonably available (e.g., increasing hostility in an already frustrating situation, walking more slowly when asked to walk down a hall, drinking more of a beverage when thirsty).

However, subliminal stimuli cannot be used to directly persuade or dictate behaviour (for example, causing hostile outbursts without provocation, getting up and walking down the corridor, or going to the soda machine and purchasing a beverage). It is possible to increase accessibility through subliminal priming, and this can affect behaviour to the extent that the newly accessible primes are applicable to the current situation.

Awareness of Automatic Processes: Aware of the Stimulus, but Unaware of the Cognitive Processes:

Actual purchasing behaviour is one area where surprisingly little research has been conducted. While much of our purchasing is done on purpose, intentionally, and deliberatively, there may be innumerable forces acting outside of our conscious awareness that influence what, when, and how we buy (Simonson, 2005). Morwitz, Fitzsimons, and others have done extensive research on the mere-measurement effect (Fitzsimons & Morwitz, 1996; Fitzsimons & Shiv, 2001; Fitzsimons & Williams, 2000; Morwitz & Fitzsimons, 2004; Morwitz, Johnson, & Schmittlein, 1993; Williams, Fitzsimons, & Block, 2004). These researchers have demonstrated in a series of studies that simply asking consumers about their purchase intentions can increase the likelihood of purchase.

Asking broad, category-level questions (for example, "How likely are you to buy an automobile?") increases the likelihood of purchase in that product category. When you ask category-level questions to regular users of a brand, you increase the likelihood of specific brand repurchase, and

when you ask category-level questions to non-users, you increase the likelihood of category leader purchase.

Because asking intentional questions increases the accessibility of attitudes toward specific members of the product category, the mere measurement effect appears to emerge. Furthermore, the effect appears to fade when respondents recognize the intention questions as attempts at persuasion. Participants in these studies are clearly aware of the environmental stimulus (a direct question about purchase intentions), but they are not aware of the automatic processes elicited by the question (increased attitude accessibility).

Awareness of Outcomes: Acting without Knowing:

Although there is a great deal of psychological research on behaviour without awareness, the work on consumer behaviour without awareness is limited, to say the least. The scientific study of behaviour without awareness is a tricky business largely because conceptual and operational definitions of behaviour without awareness are many and varied (see Adams, 1957; Frensch & Rünger, 2003).

People may be unaware of the behaviour, itself (e.g., people may not realize they are tapping their foot). People may be unaware of some behaviour's relation to a contingent event (e.g., greater likelihood of buying as a function of having been asked a question about a product category). They may be unaware of physiological responses to stimuli (e.g., pupillary response, GSR). They may be unaware of goal activation, learning, and so forth.

It is clear enough that people cannot be aware of differential behaviour as a function of subliminally presented stimuli and it is generally assumed that people are unaware of subtle changes in their behaviour as a result of priming manipulations. As noted above, when people become aware of these contingencies they tend to react against the primes.

3.3 THE NATURE AND ROLE OF AFFECT IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

What exactly does "affect" mean? The term "affect" is still used to refer to what is essentially the evaluative aspect of attitudes. This stems from the traditional three-part depiction of attitudes:

- cognitive, affective, and conative (see Eagly & Chaiken, 1993);
- a failure to distinguish adequately between evaluative measures (e.g., favourable/unfavourable); and
- antecedent or subsequent processes, which may be feeling-based.

We reserve the term "affect" to describe an internal feeling state, in accordance with recent scholarly discussions. An object, person, or position's explicit or implicit "liking" is regarded as an evaluative

judgment rather than an internal feeling state. Russell and Carroll (1999a) put it this way:

"By affect, we have in mind genuine subjective feelings and moods (as when someone says, 'I'm feeling sad'), rather than thoughts about specific objects or events (as when someone calmly says, 'The crusades were a sad unit in human history')".

Most consumer research studies on affects deal with moods (e.g., Barone, Miniard, & Romeo, 2000; Cohen & Andrade, 2004; Gorn, Goldberg, & Basu, 1993; Pham, 1998), although there has been growing interest in the study of specific emotions (e.g., Lerner, Small, & Loewenstein, 2004; Raghunathan & Pham, 1999; Raghunathan, Pham, & Corfman, 2006). Moods are frequently regarded as low-intensity and variable affective states that lack source identification. The individual, whether prompted by physiological or hormonal/chemical activity (such as changes in serotonin and dopamine levels) or by external stimuli (music, weather, exposure to happy versus sad information), experiences a vague sense of feeling good or bad without necessarily knowing why. We are aware of feeling good or bad, optimistic or pessimistic, up or down, relaxed or restless, alert or drowsy on some days or after certain experiences.

Mood states also track our bodily energy levels (e.g., blood glucose levels), our daily circadian rhythm, and our overall health or illness, guiding both relatively automatic self-regulation responses and more conscious decisions, as we will discuss later. Emotions, on the other hand, are much more differentiated and thus provide more information about attitudes and behaviours. Anger, for example, will frequently result in target and context-specific responses rather than more general displays of dissatisfaction (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). It should be noted, however, that specific emotions can produce mood-like effects (e.g., being angry or sad can affect a pattern of behaviour) without the person being aware that the emotional response (to an identified target) has been transferred to unrelated behaviours.

Recent studies show that the degree of transfer is determined by two factors:

(1) The salience of the source of the emotional state—transfer is more likely when the actual source of the affects is not salient; and

(2) The domain similarity between the actual source of the affects and the objectively unrelated behaviour (Raghunathan, Pham, & Corfman, 2006).

Moods have been shown to be easily manipulated by exposure to emotionally charged stimuli such as music, videos, and pictures, or by recalling emotionally involving experiences (e.g., Cohen & Andrade, 2004).

3.3.1 Physiological and Cognitive Antecedents of Emotion:

The influential James-Lange theory (James, 1884) proposed that emotional stimuli elicited bodily responses, such as changes in heart rate, blood pressure, and skin conductance, and that these bodily responses were translated fairly directly into conscious differences in emotional experience (e.g., fear versus anger). While there was some success in relating "energetic" physiological responses to higher arousal negative affect (when compared to lower arousal states like sadness and guilt), there was no consistent translation of bodily responses into differentiating positive affect. More broadly, such physiological measures do not appear to reflect important differences in emotional valence (Bradley, Cuthbert, & Lang, 1993; Schimmack & Crites, 2005).

A more fundamental challenge to the original theory was to call the central role of bodily response to subsequent emotional experience into question. Schachter and Singer (1962) made significant inroads by demonstrating (via epinephrine or placebo injections) that peripheral arousal only distinguished between emotional and cognitive responses. In their two-factor theory, cognitive processes were crucial in interpreting the arousal that was being felt. Other research conducted around the same time provides a significant challenge to the bodily arousal component of this theory.

Lazarus and Alfert (1964) invited participants to watch a film depicting a tribal ritual that appeared to involve genital mutilation. However, half of those watching were misled into believing that the experience was not painful and that adolescents looked forward to this initiation into manhood, despite the fact that significant cognitive control over arousal was observed. Recent memory research, for example, shows the importance of such emotional experience in memory consolidation, which is consistent with the evolutionary underpinnings of classical conditioning (Cahill & McGaugh, 1998). More broadly, emotional responses were shown to be far more susceptible to cognitive control and experience appraisals than previously thought.

3.3.2 Memory of Affective Experiences:

There is substantial evidence that the arousal intensity of an affective experience increases people's immediate and long-term memory of this experience (Bradley, Greenwald, Petry, & Lang, 1992; Kroeber-Riel, 1979; Thorson & Friestad, 1989), particularly for the central elements of this experience (Christianson, Loft us, Hoff man, & Loft us, 1991). This appears to be the case even when the source of arousal is unrelated to the material to be learned and occurs after the learning has occurred, suggesting that the phenomenon may be due, in part, to a better consolidation of memory traces under high emotional arousal (Nielson, Yee, & Erickson, 2005). Emotional intensity, however, is not a guarantee of memory accuracy.

Biases resulting from changes in cognitive appraisals of the events or revised standards of judgment (e.g., looking back, a person may have a

different perspective on the emotion-eliciting event) as well as a desire to see things differently (e.g., when anticipating a recurring experience such as childbirth) may intrude on people's memory (Levine, 1997; Levine, Prohaska, Burgess, Rice, & Laulhere, 2001). Retrospective evaluations of affective experiences appear to be more influenced by the intensity at both the peak and the end of the experience, with duration playing a less significant role (Ariely & Loewenstein, 2000; Fredrickson & Kahneman, 1993; Kahneman, Fredrickson, Schreiber, & Redelmeier, 1993; Kahneman, Fredrickson, Schreiber, & Redelmeier, 1993).

3.3.3 The Role of Affects in Consumer Judgment and Decision-Making:

In consumer judgment and decision-making, it is useful to distinguish three types of affect:

Integral Affect:

Integral affect refers to genuine affective responses that are directly related to the object of judgment or decision. Momentary feelings experienced through direct exposure to the object itself (such as the pleasant feeling of tasting a fine wine) and those experienced in response to some representation of the object—a representation that may be externally provided (e.g., a TV commercial for a product) or internally generated (e.g., thinking about a product). Affective responses are important to the extent that they are elicited by object features, whether these features are real, perceived, or only imagined.

Incidental Affect:

Incidental affect refers to affective experiences that have no obvious connection to the object under consideration. The majority of the literature on mood effects on consumer behaviour (e.g., Gardner, 1985; Kahn & Isen, 1993; Lee & Sternthal, 1999) is concerned with incidental affect, which means that the source of the mood is usually unrelated to the judgment or decision being made. Incidental affect may result from a person's emotional dispositions (such as chronic anxiety or depression) and temperament (such as general optimism or pessimism), as well as any contextual stimuli associated with integral affect (such as background music, pleasant scent, and so on).

Task-Related Affect:

Task-related affect is in the middle of integral and incidental affect. It refers to affective responses elicited by the task or process of making judgments and decisions as opposed to direct, integral responses to target object features or purely incidental feelings. The emotional stress of having to choose between two very appealing offers, for example, would be considered task-induced because the process of having to choose between these two offers is stressful, not the offers themselves.

Indeed, even when the options are associated with pleasant integral affect, such as a choice between two vacation destinations, decisions can cause unpleasant task-related affect. In the preceding example, the emotional stress would not be incidental because, by definition, it would not have occurred if a judgment or decision had not been required. In relation to consumer judgment and decision-making, each type of affect will be discussed separately.

Consumer research as a field has greatly matured in its understanding of the important role of affect in consumer behaviour over the last 15 years. The field has shifted away from its initial emphasis on mood states as "just another" source of contextual influence on consumer behaviour and ad-induced feelings as "just another" predictor of brand attitudes. The field has progressed toward a more in-depth examination of the critical role that affect—in its various forms: integral, incidental, and task-related—plays in consumers' experiences, decisions, motives, and actions. Nonetheless, while our understanding of the role of affect in consumer behaviour is expanding rapidly, the subject is still in its infancy. As this review demonstrated, many important questions remained unanswered.

For example, one important area for future research would be to determine the extent to which emotional experiences have long-term effects on consumer judgment, decision-making, and behaviour—influences that persist even after the feeling state has passed. Some preliminary evidence suggests that certain cascading mechanisms play a role in such long-term effects (Andrade & Ariely, 2007). Feelings appear to be interpreted differently depending on the questions that people ask themselves when inspecting their feelings (Pham, 2004). These questions appear to serve as lenses through which feelings are read and comprehended. Another important area of research would be to better understand the types of questions that feelings are supposed to answer.

3.3 SUMMARY

In the past 15 years, consumer research as a field has greatly matured in its understanding of the important role of affect in consumer behaviour. The field has moved away from its original emphasis on mood states as “just another” source of contextual influence on consumer behaviour and ad-induced feelings as “just another” determinant of brand attitudes.

The field has moved toward a richer analysis of the very central role that affect—in its different forms – integral, incidental, and task-related—plays in consumers’ experiences, decisions, motives, and actions. Yet, while our understanding of the role of affect in consumer behaviour may be growing rapidly, the subject is barely in its adolescence.

As illustrated by this review, so many important questions remained to be answered. For example, an important avenue for future research would be to analyze to what extent emotional experiences have lasting influences on consumer judgment, decision, and behaviour— influences that persevere after the feeling state has dissipated. Some preliminary evidence suggests

certain cascading mechanisms contribute to such lasting influences (Andrade & Ariely, 2007).

It has also been noted that feelings seem to be interpreted differently depending on the questions that people are asking themselves when inspecting their feelings (Pham, 2004). These questions seem to function as lenses through which feelings are read and understood. Another important research avenue would be to better understand the types of questions that feelings are meant to answer.

3.4 QUESTIONS

Write short notes on:

a) Implicit measures

b) Memory for affective experiences

c) The role of affect in consumer judgement and decision-making

d) Subliminal presentation of stimuli, and more overt priming effects

3.5 REFERENCES

- Adams, J. K. (1957). Laboratory studies of behaviour without awareness. *Psychological Bulletin, 54,* 383–405.
- Aizen, I., & Fishbein, M. (1977). Attitude-behaviour relations: A theoretical analysis and review of empirical research. *Psychological Bulletin, 84,* 888–918.
- Bornstein, R. F. (1992). Subliminal mere exposure effects. In R. F. Bornstein & T. S. Pittman (Eds.), *Perception without awareness* (pp. 191–210). New York: Guilford.
- Bless, H., Schwarz, N., Clore, G. L., Golisano, V., & Rabe, C. (1996). Mood and the use of scripts: Does a happy mood really lead to mindlessness? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 71*(4), 665–679.

*****

4

SOCIAL EXPERIMENT

Unit Structure

4.0 OBJECTIVES

- To understand what is a social experiment and the dominant theories in social experiments.
- To learn about the validity of the social experiment and various threats in it.
- To know the different types and advantages of social experiments.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Students, as you are aware, as a part of your current academic course, you are supposed to conduct one field experiment surrounding a particular social problem. As a part of this activity

- First, each one of you from your class will identify some social problems and choose any of them as final.
- Then, all students will prepare and make presentations on their respective single and final topics in the presence of your course teachers. Presentations can be made individually or in groups. The course teachers may decide this based on the number of students in your class or other technical factors.
- Accordingly, once all presentations are done, one single experiment will be selected as the entire group's activity. Thus, all students will have to work on that group assignment and conduct the field experiment on that topic.

- Once the field experiment is completed, all students will have to submit a brief report of this assignment containing their analysis from the social-psychological perspective. All students will be required to include their initial individual experiments that they had presented in the class.

In this process, you will be guided by your course teachers for all that you need to do. At present, in this unit, we are going to learn some basics about the social experiment. In simple words, we will learn about the concept of social experiment and its related aspects that you should be aware of before conducting the experiments. So, let us start.

4.2 SOCIAL EXPERIMENT

Over the years, social psychologists have been exploring many questions by conducting experiments, because social experiments often help in seeking to answer questions about how people behave in groups or how the presence of others impacts individual behaviour. Social experiments also explain how thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are influenced by the presence of others (Blackstad, 2008). Also, the experimental method is considered the best for establishing that a certain program or intervention has actually caused a given result or set of results.

For this purpose, social experimentation compares people – who receive a certain program (experimental treatment) with similar people – who do not or who receive some other treatment (Archibald & Newhouse; 1980). Thus, psychological inquiry into social phenomena has become virtually the same as controlled experimentation.

Social experiments take place outside of laboratories. Therefore, as compared to laboratory experiments, they tend to have less physical isolation of materials, less procedural standardization, and longer-lasting treatments. They are usually designed to test an intervention or treatment that is usually better characterized as a global package of many components.

Field researchers in social psychology usually aim to learn how to modify behaviour that has proven to be stubborn in the past, such as poor school performance, drug abuse, unemployment, or unhealthy lifestyles. They are less interested in testing a theoretical proposition about unidimensional causes and effects. Therefore, social experiments are less characterized as a likely unidimensional theory-derived causal construct.

Social experiments can be characterized both structurally and functionally (Cook, 1991a – as cited in Cook & Shadish, 1994). There are several famous social experiments. Some of them are the Asch Conformity Experiment, the Bobo Doll Experiment, the Stanford Prison Experiment, the Milgram Experiment, the Halo Effect, Cognitive Dissonance, Robber's Cave Experiment, the False Consensus Effect, Social Identity Theory, Negotiation – two psychological strategies that matter most, Bystander

Effect and the Diffusion of Responsibility (Blakstad, 2018; Cherry, 2023; Dean, 2023).

Archibald and Newhouse (1980) published a report "Social experimentation: Some whys and hows" prepared under a grant from the US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. This report is one of the products of Rand's Health Insurance Study, which was sponsored by the US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare itself. This report uses Rand's experience to draw lessons about the technology of social experimentation for researchers who are willing to engage in social experiments. The report intends to guide those people who will make decisions on implementing social experiments, and who will either monitor the progress of or actually conduct social experiments.

For this purpose, this report is divided into three parts by the authors. Let us focus on and discuss them briefly to understand the technical aspects of social experimentation. These three parts are as follows:

When to conduct and not to conduct a social experiment?

Experiments can be conducted to avoid the difficult problems that are encountered with other methods. These problems are listed below –

- Other methods typically compare groups that are or may be different and attempt to adjust for differences;
- In such cases, the adjustment may not be fully satisfactory;
- Such methods may leave the cause-and-effect relationship ambiguous.
- Already existing data, which other methods often have to work with, may be difficult to analyze, and may not be dependable for the proposed program or treatment; or such data can be used only by making unverifiable assumptions.
- In such situations, inferences about program effects may be questionable.

However, it is usually more expensive and time-consuming to collect and analyze experimental data than using the existing data. Therefore, the researchers are ideally suggested to conduct the experiment when –

- They are sure that existing data will not be sufficient for the purpose; and
- They are sure that the problem to be studied is important enough to justify the expenditure of resources.

In contrast, researchers are suggested not to conduct social experiments in the following conditions –

- Adequacy of existing data;
- Inability to obtain sufficient observations;

- Inability to define or control a relevant treatment variable;
- Unresolvable ethical issues; and
- Important outcomes that are not measurable.

How to manage a social experiment?

Social experimentation has its unique aspects, because of which it has gained considerable attention in the literature along with the characteristics of the person who will manage the experiment. The researchers/experiment managers or experimenters should possess the following desirable characteristics:

- They must possess all traditional managerial skills needed for planning, operations, financial management, personnel management, public relations, and communications.
- They should be organized into a research team or teams and an action or operations team or teams (including a data processing group).
- As being responsible for analyzing the data, the research team must have ultimate authority over the experiment. There should be early and frequent interaction between such research teams, which is necessary for the success of the experiment.
- The research teams must respect each other and understand the restrictions imposed on each member of the team.
- As one of the crucial duties, the manager should preserve the integrity of the treatments – a task for which it is essential to create information systems that permit monitoring the field operations.
- They must possess planning and cost estimation skills, which are important for avoiding deficiencies that can undermine the best-designed experiments.
- They must be able to consider highly interrelated field operations involved in most experiments and dependencies among them to avoid the possibility of poor-quality data.
- The data processing group from the research team should participate in the early stages of experimental design to plan efficient and effective operations for processing the data obtained in the experiment.

Thus, experimenters or the whole research team should be skillful in carrying out various tasks involved in social experimentation.

Some practical advice ("tips") to experimenters:

Archibald and Newhouse (1980, p. 24) offer several tips to the prospective experimenters. They are as follows:

- Create a pilot sample of people with whom to pretest the operational feasibility of the experiment.
- Build into the design an ability to measure effects that are an artefact of the experiment.
- Construct the experiment to keep refusal and attrition at low levels, especially refusal and attrition correlated with treatments.
- Do not strongly oversample a group whose membership is not well-defined.
- Inform the participants in some detail about the treatment and their obligations.
- Choose the number of sites and length of enrollment to minimize variance, given a fixed project budget.
- Do not attempt too much, but do not be easily discouraged while carrying out the process of experiment right from the beginning till the end.

Apart from these tips, Section 4.2 also attempts to explain to you the steps to be taken in the process of conducting an experiment and reporting it, which you may find helpful. However, students who are interested in conducting experiments in their respective fields, including Psychology, are advised to go through this report by Archibald and Newhouse (1980) and other such informative literature on social experiments to gain deep knowledge about dealing with experiments.

Dominant Theories of Social Experimentation:

Theories of Causation:

Experimentation is predicated on the manipulability or activity theory of causation (Collingwood, 1940; Mackie, 1974; Gasking, 1955; Whitbeck, 1977). The theory of causation tries to identify agents that are under human control and can be manipulated to bring about desired changes. This utilitarian conception of causation corresponds closely with common-sense and evolutionary biological understandings of causation. It assumes that this kind of cause-effect connection can be useful.

Experiments have the same purpose and they probe whether a force that is suddenly introduced into an ongoing system influences particular outcomes in a way that would not have occurred without the intervention. Thus, the aim of experiments is to describe these causal consequences, and not to explain how and why they occurred. Experiments can be made more explanatory primarily in two ways:

- By selecting independent and dependent variables that explicitly explore a particular theoretical issue or

- By collecting measures of mediating processes that occurred after a cause was manipulated and without which the effect would presumably not have come about.

If any of these conditions are met, social experiments are superior. These theories give priority to two important aspects –

- causal explanation rather than causal description; and
- Isolating why a causal connection comes about rather than inferring that a cause and effect are related.

Individual experiments are designed to test the effects of one or a few manipulable independent variables over a restricted range of treatment variants, outcome realizations, populations of persons, types of settings, and historical time periods.

Theories of Categorization:

Classic theories of categorization hypothesize that instances belong to a class if they have all the fixed attributes of that class. However, this approach was widely discredited (Rosch, 1978; Lakoff, 1987; Medin, 1989). Also, later there was a new recognition –

- that all categories have fuzzy rather than clearly demarcated boundaries (Zimmerman et al., 1984);
- that some elements are more central or prototypical than others (Smith & Medin, 1989); and
- that knowledge of common theoretical origins is sometimes more useful for classifying instances than the degree of initially observed similarity (Medin, 1989).

The attributes used for classification evolve with advances somewhere else in a scholarly field. Categorization is not just a logical process, but it is also a complex psychological process or a set of processes that is not yet fully understood. Ideally, social experiments require researchers –

- to explain a cause or an effect construct, or
- to identify its more prototypical attributes, and then
- to construct an intervention or outcome that seems to be an exemplar of that construct.

In experimental practice, it is almost impossible to sample treatment variants, outcome measures, or historical times in a random fashion which is required for sampling theory. Hence, in individual experiments, generalization depends on the purposive rather than random selection of instances and samples to represent particular categories of treatment, outcome, people, or settings.

Validity of Social Experiments:

Social experiments have the following two types of validity:

Internal validity:

Campbell, a social scientist, coined the term internal validity to refer to inferences about whether the relationship between two operationalized variables was causal in the particular contexts where the relationship had been tested to date.

External validity:

Campbell also invented external validity to express the extent to which a causal relationship can be generalized across different types of settings, persons, times, and ways of operationalizing a cause and an effect.

However, Dunn (1982) criticized the validity typology of Campbell and his colleagues, because neither internal nor external validity refers to the importance of the research questions being addressed in the social experiment.

Some scholars tried to extend Campbell's concept of internal validity even further, as internal validity was not understood in the way Campbell intended. Eventually, the critics understood that their views about Campbell's description of internal validity were very restricted. Similarly, the changes also took place in Campbell's original concept of external validity. Cook and Campbell (1979) distinguished between generalizing to theoretical cause and effect constructs and generalizing to populations of persons and settings. They used construct validity to refer to generalizing theoretical cause and effect constructs, and external validity was used to refer to generalizing populations of persons and settings.

Campbell (1986) relabelled and replaced the internal validity with the new term 'local molar causal validity' and tried to reduce this ambiguity of the concept of internal validity among scholars. On the other hand, Campbell (1986) also relabelled external validity as 'proximal similarity' to clarify his own different understanding of external validity and to emphasize a theory of generalization based on using observable attributes to infer whether a particular sample of units, treatments, observations, or settings belonged in a particular class or category as that class or category is usually understood within a local research community or in ordinary English-language usage.

Threats in Social Experiments:

Cook and Campbell (1979) drew attention to four novel threats that are observed in social experiments. These threats affect the treatment contrast without necessarily influencing the major treatment purportedly under test. They are as follows:

1. Resentful demoralization:

It occurs when members of control groups or groups receiving less desirable treatments learn that other groups are receiving more. If they become resentful because of this focused comparison, their performance might decrease and lead to a treatment-control difference.

2. Compensatory rivalry:

It can arise if the focused inequity that so many experimental contrasts require leads members of the groups receiving less to respond by trying harder to show that they do not observe their implicitly lower status. Such kind of motivation obscures the true effects occurring in treatment groups because performance in the control groups should improve.

3. Compensatory equalization:

This occurs when administrators are not willing to tolerate focused inequities and they use whatever optional resources they control to equalize what each group receives. This also threatens to obscure the true effects of the treatment.

4. Treatment diffusion:

This occurs when treatment providers or recipients learn what other treatment groups are doing and impressed by the new practices, copy them. This threat also obscures planned treatment contrasts.

Each of these threatens to bias treatment effect estimates when compared to situations where the experimental units cannot communicate about the different treatments.

Apart from this, considering some characteristics of social events leads to significant failures of experiments (Gergen, 1978). These characteristics are as follows –

- embeddedness of social events in broader cultural patterns;
- their position within extended sequences;
- their open competition within real-life settings;
- their reliance on psychological unions; and
- their complex determination.

Another set of problems that could invalidate an experiment includes the following –

- insufficient observations;
- inability to define or control the treatment variable; and
- important outcomes that are not measurable.

We have learned previously about these conditions, under which conducting an experiment is not suggested. Thus, there are many possible obstacles that may hinder or prohibit social experimentation.

4.2.1 Types of Social Experiments:

Social experiments are of two types and both of these types have the sudden intervention, knowledge of intervention onset, posttest, and causal counterfactual component that characterize all experiments. Let us have a look at these two types of social experiments.

Randomized experiments:

They have units that are assigned to treatments or conditions using procedures that mimic a lottery. In other words, participants have equal chances to get selected for different treatments or conditions involved in the experiment. In randomized experiments, the expected mean difference between randomly created groups is zero, which reflects the strength of this kind of experiment.

There are many fields in which randomized experiments have been preferred over quasi-experiments, for example – labour economics, community-based health promotion research, biostatistics, etc. The best situation for random assignment is said to be when the demand for the treatment under evaluation exceeds the supply.

A key concern while using random assignment in field settings is when the respondents are assigned to treatments. Riecken and Boruch (1974) identified the following three options for assigning the respondents to treatments while using random assignment –

- Before respondents learn of the measurement burdens and treatment alternatives;
- After they learn of the measurement demands, but before they learn of the content of the treatments being contrasted; and
- After they know of the measurement demands and treatments and agree to be in whatever treatment condition the coin toss (or equivalent thereof) determines for them.

Using random assignment in complex field settings is more difficult because researchers often do not do the physical assignment process themselves. They may design the process and write the protocols determining assignment, whether as manuals or computer programs implementing a complex stratification design. In this case, it becomes difficult for two possibilities –

- when the implementers at the point of service delivery misunderstand what they are supposed to do – which is mostly a matter of improved training; and

- at other times, professional judgement predominates over the planned selection criteria and assignment occurs by presumptions about a client's need or merit instead of by lottery.

Thus, random assignment can be complicated, especially when social programs are being tested. Also, treatment-correlated respondent attrition is another particularly problematic situation that arises in social experiments. This situation leads to a selection bias which is a problem worsened in social experiments, because the treatments being compared often differ in intrinsic desirability and attrition is generally higher, the less desirable the intervention.

Social experimenters cannot take for granted that a perfect random assignment plan will be perfectly implemented. Social experiments have to be monitored closely for the following two purposes:

- to check on the quality of implementation of the research design, including random assignment; and

- to check on the quality of the implementation of the intervention program itself.

When social experiments occur in complex field contexts, they rarely permit experimental isolation. This allows treatments to scatter in response to many types of forces that are quite different from each other. Treatment diffusion is not rare in social experiments. Therefore, experimenters have to look for opportunities to study groups that cannot communicate with each other.

Quasi-experiments:

They involve treatments that are assigned non-randomly, mostly because the units under study – usually individuals, work groups, schools or neighbourhoods – select themselves into treatments or they are assigned by administrators based on analysis of who merits or needs the opportunity being tested.

In quasi-experiments, researchers attempt to eliminate validity threats by design rather than by statistical adjustment. Campbell and Stanley (1963) outlined the basic design features for this purpose and they were added to the work carried out by Cook and Campbell (1979). These basic design features include pretests, pretest time series, non-equivalent control groups, matching, etc.

In quasi-experiments, the local setting must be examined carefully to determine which validity threats are possible and to identify such threats that might be operating. Thinking about quasi-experiments has evolved along the following three lines:

1. Toward a better understanding of designs that make point-specific predictions;

2. Toward predictions about the multiple implications of a given causal hypothesis; and

3. Toward improved analysis of data from quasi-experiments.

Let us briefly discuss the designs in quasi-experiments which emphasize these three lines:

1. Designs emphasizing point-specific causal hypotheses:

Interrupted time series and regression discontinuity are two important designs from this category of quasi-experiments.

In **interrupted time series**, the same outcome variable is examined over many time points. An effective treatment should lead to changes in the level, slope, or variance of the time series at the point where treatment occurred if the cause-effect link is quick-acting or has a known causal delay. Then the test is whether the obtained data show the change in the series at the pre-specified point.

There are the following two validity-related problems that can occur –

- **Statistical conclusion validity:** This is a potential problem because errors in a time series are likely to be auto-correlated by creating a bias in ordinary least-squares estimates of the standard error and hence a bias in statistical tests.

- **Internal validity:** This is a major problem, especially because of history (e.g., some other outcome-causing event occurring at the same time as the treatment) and instrumentation (e.g., a change in record-keeping occurring with the treatment).

Possible threats are best eliminated by using additional time series. These are especially important:

(a) Control group series not expected to show the hypothesized discontinuity in level, slope, or variability of an outcome; and

(b) Additional treatment series to which the same treatment is applied at different times, so the obtained data is expected to recreate the known differences is when the treatment was made available.

Interrupted time series designs are infrequently used despite their strength for causal hypothesis testing. Though with unpredicted causal lags time series have an ambiguous relationship with the point of treatment implementation, interrupted time series designs have a special status among quasi-experimental designs wherever possible.

The **regression discontinuity design** is named so because a regression line is plotted to relate the assignment and outcome variables. If the treatment is effective, a discontinuity in the regression line should occur at the cutoff point. Mosteller (1990, p. 225) defines regression discontinuity as a true experiment. Goldberger (1972a, b – as cited in Cook & Shadish, 1994) and Rubin (1977) have provided formal statistical proof that

regression discontinuity provides an unbiased estimate of treatment effects, just like the randomized experiment.

Regression discontinuity design has a widespread endorsement and it is frequently reinvented in different disciplines. This shows that it is useful whenever it is worth or it is needed, which determines treatment assignment. Studies of this kind are even rarer than interrupted time series studies for two reasons:

- Partly because the assignment is not always done according to strict public criteria. Along with the use of multiple criteria, some of which are judgemental, professional judgement and cronyism also play some role in the assignment.
- The rare number of studies with this design is also because the analysis requires accurate modelling of the functional form of the assignment-outcome relationship.

The researchers using these designs of quasi-experimentation usually have less control over the treatment assignment implementation processes. Therefore, problems that are found even with randomized experiments are likely to have more serious practical consequences for regression-discontinuity designs. However, this design can be used whenever there is a special need or merit considering the particular services whose effectiveness is to be evaluated. Though this design has flexibility and perfect logic, many researchers are still sceptical about it.

1. Designs emphasizing multivariate-complex causal predictions:

Often, there are few possible alternatives resulting from the successful prediction of a complex pattern of multivariate. The design elements to be combined for such prediction include –

- Non-equivalent dependent variables, only a subset of which is theoretically responsive to treatment, though all the dependent variables are responsive to the other possible alternative explanations of an outcome change;
- Designs where treatment is introduced, removed, and reintroduced to the same group;
- Non-equivalent group designs that have two or more pretest measurement waves providing a pre-intervention estimate of differences in rates of change between non-equivalent groups;
- Non-equivalent group designs with multiple comparison groups, some of which initially outperform the treatment group and some of which underperform it (Holland, 1986);
- Cohort designs that use naturally occurring cycles in families or educational institutions to construct control groups of siblings or next year's freshmen that are initially less different than controls constructed in almost any other way;

- Other designs that match units on demonstrably stable attributes to reduce initial group non-equivalence without causing statistical regression (Holland, 1986); and
- Designs that partition respondents or settings, even after the fact, to create subgroups that differ in treatment exposure levels and so in expected effect size.

Point-specific and multivariate-complex predictions lower the chance that possible alternatives will make exactly the same prediction as the causal hypothesis under test. However, these predictions cannot guarantee lowered chances of this.

2. Statistical analysis of data from the basic non-equivalent control group design:

There is a growing advocacy of designs making point-specific or multivariate complex predictions (Cook, 1991a – cited in Cook & Shadish, 1994). However, the most frequently employed quasi-experiment still involves only two (non-equivalent) groups and two measurement waves – 1) a pretest, and the other 2) a posttest – measured on the same instrument.

This design is superficially like the simplest randomized experiment and is easy to implement. Though, they have great popularity, it is not easy to justify causal inferences from this design.

Nearly all experiments are conducted with local samples and in places that are convenient for the researchers and that involve only one or two operationalizations of treatment, though there may be more operationalizations of an outcome. This is done for compelling logistical reasons.

Overall, we can say that in the present era, field experiments have become much more common than they were twenty years ago. Randomized experiments are favoured more than quasi-experiments.

4.2.2 Advantages of Social Experiment:

As we have studied what is a social experiment and many theoretical practical/technical aspects of it, let us now look at what are its advantages.

Determination of causality:

Because the experimenter controls the program policy or treatment and who receives it, one can be more confident that an association between the program and outcome was not false.

Expanding the range of variation in existing data:

Existing data are often insufficient for evaluating a proposed program, because they do not apply to the relevant range. In such cases, experiments can help in expanding the range of variation in existing data.

Improving analytical tractability:

Properly designed experiments enable one to specify the data to be collected in ways that make the experimental results relatively easy to analyze.

Availability of data:

The analyst may not have the data necessary to make sound predictions of a proposed program's effects; new data therefore must be sought to enable an empirical analysis before implementing a program. In such situations, experiments can be more helpful, if planned carefully.

Implementation issues:

An experiment may be helpful sometimes in revealing unsuspected implementation issues, when a new program is being considered to be undertaken.

Thus, when a social experiment is designed and executed properly, it can provide the strongest evidence and the analyst can infer most confidently that a given intervention (program) actually caused a given result (Riecken et al., 1974; Gilbert, Light, and Mosteller, 1975).

4.3 EXERCISE TO PERFORM: CONDUCTING A SOCIAL EXPERIMENT AND WRITING A REPORT

4.3.1 Steps to Consider: Identifying A Social Problem To Submitting A Report On The Social Experiment:

In Section 4.1, you might have got clarity right in the beginning, that the activity or exercise that you are going to perform based on this unit, can be divided mainly into three parts:

1. **Identifying a social problem and making a presentation** based on that in the classroom (whether individually or in a group);
2. **Selecting a single topic** as final for the entire group activity **and conducting a field experiment** on that.
3. **Submitting a brief report** on the field experiment conducted on a selected social problem, including the one based on which presentations were made.

We will see what steps you will have to follow for each of the parts. Let us have a look at it step-by-step. In a way, this section will try to provide you with some useful tips in case you are totally directionless or completely unaware of how to proceed. In addition to this, refer to "How to do Action Research?" from Section 2.1.1 of Unit 2, which will be also helpful in revising your knowledge about conducting such research-related activities.

1. Identifying a social problem and making a presentation:

Identify social problem:

At this stage, you can refer to the list consisting of a few handful topics of social problems that you already might have prepared, based on your observation of the surroundings, that you might have already decided to work on.

Use observation and communication skills:

If you do not have any handy list as such, no need to worry. You can start your search for social problems in your surroundings. For this, you need to be alert and use your observation and communication skills mindfully. That is, observe the surroundings around you and try to find out whether you perceive any problem, considering the present status of any particular place, the group of people, any community, etc. as a vulnerable section of society. Thus, you will be able to identify more than one social problem. In case you observe some social situation among them that needs to be attended to through research, you can explore it through your communication skills. That is, you may build up a rapport with a few members of them and communicate with them in a sensitive and responsible manner in order to inquire and know about their actual problems. If not more than one, you will succeed in identifying at least one social problem for sure.

Maintain moderate difficulty level:

Remember that this is your academic course. Therefore, whatever social problem you identify and wish to work on, maintain its difficulty at a moderate level – that is, it should not appear too easy and simple, as well as it should not be too difficult or challenging to handle for you.

Try to make your experiment unique:

As we all are aware, several social problems already exist in our surroundings. So there are chances that many of you come up with the same problem in your respective lists. No problem with that. But, what can make a difference in your topics is – your respective points of view for looking at that same problem and the way you are going to study it. It means that you can still make a common problem identified as different by handling it in a unique way, that is studying different aspects of it.

Prepare a presentation with a well-defined experiment:

Once you identify social problem/s to work on – regardless of whether you will be conducting a social experiment on it individually or in groups – start preparation for your presentation. While preparing the presentation, make sure that you have the identified social problem well-defined. That is, you have clarity in your mind about what aspects of the social problems you are going to study (actual problem of your field experiment), how exactly you are going to study that problem (methodology), etc.

There is no hard-and-fast rule for preparing a presentation, except using a structure of research study in it – that is right from the introduction to proper references (excluding research findings, discussion and conclusion that you will arrive at later after conducting your experiment). You are provided with a hypothetical example for reporting your completed field experiment (Tables 4.2 and 4.3) in this section as you proceed further. You can consider the same for making your presentation more well-defined and organized.

Explore previous research studies:

To make your field experiment appear well-defined, you should also take the help of previous research studies. That is, at this master's level course, you are expected to start your quest by going through many, at least sufficient research papers, related to your topic and interest, that are published in online sources. Even your academic institutions might have some sources like libraries where you can go physically and search for research papers based on your topic.

Studying previous research papers on the identified social problems will give you four benefits: (1) Some research papers will hint at the unexplored areas of the social problem/s that you are interested in working on. It will be of great help to make your experiment appear unique, (2) It will give you more knowledge about that particular social problem that you have identified for studying, (3) It will help you increase your further interest in that chosen area, (4) It will also inculcate a habit to explore more in that area, and (5) It will also give you the insight into how to conduct and report social experiments.

2. Selecting a single topic and conducting a field experiment:

Selecting a single topic:

Once the presentations of all students are over, a single topic for conducting a social/field experiment will be selected by your course teacher/s or it may be selected by considering the opinions of all students in the classroom.

A list of topics from Section 2.6 of Unit 2 can be referred to for selecting the topic for the experiment or even you can think of some fresh topic which you might have observed as a social problem.

Conducting a field experiment:

The more the experiment is well-defined, the easier it is to conduct on the field as all directions will be self-explanatory. In case you encounter any difficulty while conducting an experiment or even before or after that, you can discuss it with your course teachers and get clarity on it. The most important thing here is following ethical considerations (such as maintaining privacy, confidentiality, etc.) while conducting a field experiment, especially while collecting data, where participants are involved.

While conducting the experiment, you need to consider the following general steps as applicable to your topic for planning the experiment:

- Consider all possible requirements of the experiment, in terms of the full-fledged plan of your experiment along with the budget required for the same (Refer the Unit 2).
- What social problem would you study? What will be your target population?
- Where can you find your target population? How would you approach the target population of the experiment?
- What will be the appropriate sample size for your experiment?
- How would you collect data from the sample? Or what method would you use to collect the data – randomized or quasi-experiment?
- Preparing the list of all ethical considerations in research that you must follow and the possible ways to fulfil them.
- Preparing all required material to take care of those ethical considerations, like protocols for seeking informed consent from the participants.
- What and how much physical material and apparatus would you require, such as stationery, stop-watches, computers/particular software, etc.?
- What are the other possible expenditures included in the experiment, such as travelling, internet usage, telecommunications, etc.?
- Can the experiment be conducted in your institute or can also be conducted in other institutions or at social places?
- Make sure that your experiment is not too simple to challenge your abilities or it is not even too challenging to disappoint you.
- Whether you will be working individually on the experiment or you are divided into groups for conducting the experiment, maintain healthy competition between groups by thinking about your own experiment in terms of what novel idea you can reflect in it.
- At the same time, be supportive, and learn to understand others' limitations and the possible ways you can help them through their situations. Working with others and for others will definitely enrich your research experiences and will help you progress as a researcher, enabling you to explore opportunities for the same even from the smallest activities.

These are some general guidelines that you can consider. However, you surely may think over some other aspects also which may not have been

covered in these guidelines and you consider those aspects as important. Also, add them to the above-mentioned existing list.

3. Submitting a brief report:

Follow the given format/structure:

Here, we will provide you with a structure/format with a hypothetical example to submit the report on the experiment conducted, which you are already familiar with in your third year of graduation in Psychology. You can follow it with the required changes as per the topic of your social experiment. Since you will be submitting a report on the experiment, it will follow more or less the same format as for the action research and empirical research (Refer to Table 2.2 from Unit 2). Though we are using the same example here from Unit 2 for our convenience, you will observe some changes in it as per the requirement of this present unit on social experiments. This will also help you get an insight into how a single topic can be handled in different ways.

Nature of language:

Use a language that reflects sensitivity and objectivity to narrate your observations and overall experiment in a given format/structure. Do not describe your subjective experiences.

Follow ethical considerations:

While writing a report, do not disclose any sensitive information that might have been shared by any participant unless it is required to support any of your findings. However, this should be done without disclosing the identity of the participant/s and maintaining their anonymity and privacy.

Table 4.1 Structure/format with a hypothetical example to submit the report on the experiment

- **Research Title** (For example, Effectiveness of Audiovisual Teaching Methods over Traditional Teaching Methods in Public/Private Schools – First page)
- **Author** (Experimenter's name/s with other required details like institutional affiliation- First page)
- **Content** (with page numbers – Next page; Example provided in Table 4.2)
- **Introduction** (Starting from next page – about 4-5 pages or as required)

There is no such page/word limit when you actually document some research for your final dissertation or Ph.D. thesis or even at the non-academic/professional level. But since you are submitting a report on the experiment that you conducted at the master's level, 4 to 5 pages should be enough, not going into depth. You may also take the opinion of your

course teachers on the expected length of the introduction and overall the length of the report.

The introduction part will include the overall description of the problem/variable that you have chosen to study. Thus, it will mainly include:

- A definition and description of the variable/s under study – in brief, or as required;
- Its nature (along with any associated problems, if any);
- Its prevalence – in the country where you will be conducting research and globally (in short – previous research references can be cited);
- Categories of the problem/variable (if any – previous research studies can be cited);
- Different models developed related to the problem/variable, e.g., biological model, psycho-social model, etc. (if any – previous research studies can be cited)
- Solutions to the problem/various findings related to the variable (how the problem can be dealt with at different levels, e.g., psychological, biological, etc. – previous research studies can be cited)
- Any other points can be covered in the introduction which can make your proposal more effective.

- **Rationale of the study**

Specify the reason/s behind why the particular social problem has been chosen to study (your presentation should explain this well, so that there are increased chances of getting your topic of experiment selected).

- **Significance of the study**

Specify why the particular social problem is so significant to study (your presentation should explain this well, so that there are increased chances of getting your topic of experiment selected).

- **Problem** (Continuing from the next page till References)

The problem of the present experiment is to study the effectiveness of audiovisual teaching methods over traditional teaching methods in public/private schools.

- **Aim**

The present experiment aimed to study the difference between the effectiveness of audiovisual teaching methods and traditional

teaching methods.

- **Objectives**

- To examine the difference between the effectiveness of audiovisual teaching methods and traditional teaching methods on students from public/private schools.

- (Some other objectives can be formed, if required, based on what you aim to study)

However, only major objectives can be specified in the presentation, in case there are possible sub-objectives.

- **Hypotheses/ Research Questions (State either hypotheses or research questions for your experiment.** This particular example shows the hypotheses**)**

- There will be a significant difference between the academic performance of students who are taught with audiovisual teaching methods and traditional teaching methods.

- Audiovisual teaching methods will reflect greater academic performance of students than the traditional teaching methods in _____ (private/public/both) schools.

(Such hypotheses can be stated differently based on the settings in which you are studying the problem – for example, the second hypothesis can be stated separately according to the type of method and type of school)

- (Some other hypotheses can be formed, if required, based on the aim and objectives of your study)

However, like objectives, only major hypotheses can be specified in the presentation in order to avoid unnecessary length.

An example of the research question could be –

Which teaching method will yield the better or greater academic performance of students in private/public schools? (in terms of Traditional/empirical research)

- **Literature Review/ Review of Literature:**

Previous research studies and their findings related to the variables (e.g., Type of teaching methods) that will be studied by you (about 1 or 2 pages or as required including the variables that will be studied, not going much in-depth).

- **Methodology:**

- *Design*

A quasi-experiment was carried out with an interrupted time series. That is, an experiment was conducted in students' natural school settings with an interval gap of one week.

- *Sample and sample size*

200 students of 5th Standard from 5 private and 5 public schools in Mumbai city

(Specify the population that will be studied along with their age range/group e.g., between ____ and _____ years, if required; number of participants _____ from _____ city, _____ state, _____ country, if applicable).

Note: The above example is hypothetical. Choose and state your experiment sample and sample size carefully.

- *Operational Definitions of Variables* (Define independent variable, and dependent variable as they will be used. Also, specify control variables used if any, such as age, religion, etc.)

Independent Variable/s (One below the other, if more than one)*:*

Type of Teaching Methods: Two types of teaching methods will be studied –

i) Audiovisual method: Define the way it will be studied (specify its levels in terms of categories, if any).

ii) Traditional method: Define the way it will be studied (specify its levels in terms of categories, if any).

Dependent Variable/s (One below the other, if more than one): Effectiveness of teaching method - Define the way it will be studied (specify its levels in terms of categories, if any).

Control Variables (if any, One below the other, if more than one):

i) Age groups: _____ (specify, if any),

ii) Gender _____ (specify, if any),

- *Apparatus and Material* (Meniton all materials and equipment that were used for the experiment along with their specific purpose, if required, one below the other)

1) Chalks/white-board markers and dusters,

2) PowerPoint presentation prepared for the particular school topic,

3) Mention the remaining materials that were used, in a similar way.

- *Procedure with Instructions* (Explain the whole procedure right from your visit to a school, rapport-building with students till the end of the experiment along with ethical considerations that you followed. Also,

write down the instructions given to the participants before, during and after the experiment, step by step. You need not repeat this procedure for each school while writing a report, rather you will mention it only once, since you would have repeated exactly the same procedures for each school.)

- *Statistical Analysis of Data (Mention in brief)*:

1) Descriptive statistics – Total, mean, standard deviation

2) Inferential statistics – t-test (any other statistics, if applicable)

List down the statistical techniques used for data analysis

- **Analysis of Data (Write in detail since you will be writing this after the completion of the experiment):**

Mention the statistical techniques analysis that you used, what they computed and why those particular techniques were used.

- **Results and Discussion:**

Here all findings can be specified that you arrived at after the completion of the experiment, based on each objective and hypothesis/research question and the possible explanations for those results. You can also specify some previous research findings which support the findings of findings from your experiment (for example, whether the results of your experiment were in the expected directions, if yes – why? or even if no – why?).

- **Conclusion:** (specify the major findings of your experiment in short considering its objectives and hypotheses; and what they mean overall).

- **References:**

References of the previous research studies that are used in the introduction, literature review and any other section, such as methodology.

To be written in the latest/running APA (American Psychological Association) style format edition or any other style format (MLA, Chicago, etc.) preferred by the institution you are undertaking the course.

- **Appendix** (**if applicable** – in case, you want to add some important information that you were not supposed to add as a part of the main text of your report).

Table 4.2 Example of Content Page

Sr. No.		**Page No.**
1	Introduction	3 – 7
2	Rationale of the study	….
3	Significance of the study	….
…	…….	…..
….	…….	…..
13	References	…..

Here, we conclude this unit with the hope that you all will enjoy this experimental activity and have an enriched understanding and knowledge about research and related activities, like experiments.

4.4 SUMMARY

In this unit, we tried to understand the concept of social experiment and its various aspects. Social experiments take place outside of laboratories. They are usually designed to test an intervention or treatment and have less physical isolation of materials, less procedural standardization, and longer-lasting treatments. They are less characterized as a likely unidimensional theory-derived causal construct. We learned about when to conduct and not to conduct experiments and how to manage experiments. We also looked at some practical advice for experimenters.

Theories of causation and theories of categorization are the dominant theories in social experimentation. We have learned about them briefly along with Campbell's concepts of internal and external validity of social experiments. Resentful demoralization, compensatory rivalry, compensatory equalization, and treatment diffusion are the four novel threats identified by Cook and Campbell (1979) that are observed in social experiments. After that, we learned about two types of social experiments, called randomized experiments and quasi-experiments along with their important details.

In Section 4.3, we focused on the various steps that you need to take right from identifying a social problem and selecting the topic for conducting a social experiment to reporting on the experiment that you have conducted.

4.5 QUESTIONS

1. Explain the concept of the social experiment and two dominant theories in social experimentation.

2. Write a note on the validity of and threats in social experiments.

3. What are the two types of social experiments? Discuss in detail.

4. Write short notes:

a) Theories of Causation

b) Theories of Classification

c) Validity of social experiments

d) Threats in social experiments

e) Randomized experiments

f) Quasi-experiments

g) Advantages of social experiments

4.6 REFERENCES

- Cook, T. D. & Shadish, W. R. (1994). Social experiments: Some developments over the past fifteen years. *Annual Reviews of Psychology, 45*, 545-580. Available at arjournals.annualreviews.org
- Blakstad, O. (October 2008). Social psychology experiments. Retrieved Nov. 23, 2023 - from Explorable.com: https://explorable.com/social-psychology-experiments
- Cherry, K. (November 2023). The most famous social psychology experiments ever performed. Verywell mind. Retrieved from https://www.verywellmind.com/famous-social-psychology-experiments-2795667.
- Dean, J. (January 2023). Social Psychology Experiments: 10 of the most famous studies. PsyBlog. Retrieved from https://www.spring.org.uk/2023/01/social-psychology-experiments.php.
- Gergen, K. J. (1978). Experimentation in social psychology: A reappraisal. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 8*(4), 507-527. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2420080407
- Archibald, R. W., & Newhouse, J. P. (1980). Social experimentation: Some whys and hows. Prepared under a grant from the US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare [Report no. R-2479-HEW]. Canada: Rand. Available at https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/reports/2007/R2479.pdf

*****

5

FOCUSED GROUP DISCUSSION

Unit Structure

5.0 OBJECTIVES

- To understand the concept of the focused group, its origin, and wide applications.
- To understand the concept of focused group discussion.
- To know the uses, prohibited uses, advantages, disadvantages, strengths, and limitations of the focused groups, common myths about them and the challenges in using them.
- To know the roles of the researchers/ moderators, technical aspects of sampling in focused group discussions, and the recording methods widely used while conducting them.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Students, as a part of your course accomplishment, you need to conduct a focused group discussion and submit a report based on that. This focused group discussion will be either based on the need-diagnostic or problem-focused group study in any area of social relevance.

Let us now understand some basic information about the concept of the focused group discussion. Before that, we will need to understand what is a focus or focused group. We will now maintain the terms ‘focused group/s’ and ‘focused group discussion’ throughout the unit as mentioned in your syllabus.

Focused Groups:

Like interviews, focused groups have become one of the important methods for qualitative research. They have been used in many ways

across a range of disciplines and research topics. Thus, they are continually evolving. With some modification, they can be utilized effectively both in terms of – the components of topic guides, stimulus materials, question content and style of moderators, - and the nature of involvement of participants to address an almost endless list of essential research topics.

Origin of Focused Groups:

Generally, focused groups seem to have emerged in the 1940s. They were first used by Paul Lazarsfeld, Robert Merton and colleagues at the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University to test the reactions to propaganda and radio broadcasts during the Second World War. They originally termed this method as 'focused interviews' (Merton & Kendall, 1946) and acknowledged that these group interviews can produce a broader range of responses and elicit additional details (Merton, 1987).

The focused group methods became the foundation of broadcasting, marketing, and public opinion research in the post-Second World War period. However, they were largely neglected in mainstream academic and evaluation research. They gained considerable popularity also within organizational research and development, particularly as practised by staff at the Tavistock Institute of London during the 1940s.

Applications of Focused Groups in Various Fields:

There is a lot of evidence that reflects the usage of focused groups in various fields.

Community Development and Health Services:

Community development and participatory approaches influenced the use of focused groups in other contexts. Focused groups are also claimed to have the capacity to empower people and provide more authentic data. However, such claims need to be examined critically.

Focused groups with participatory methods have been employed by health services researchers, particularly in relation to health needs assessment, and they frequently involve participants in developing the research design, and even data analysis (Cawston & Barbour, 2003).

The health services research has mastered the use of the focused group technique most enthusiastically. In this area, a large body of focused group research is concerned with providing insights into the experience of people with a range of chronic conditions.

Apart from this, some focused group work has explicitly given voice to and provided insights into the experiences of marginalized groups, such as-

- HIV-positive women (Marcenko & Samost, 1999; Morrow et al., 2001);

- people with sickle cell disease (Thomas & Taylor, 2001);
- multiple sclerosis (Nicolson & Anderson, 2001);
- women with endometriosis (Cox et al., 2003); and
- patients with chronic bronchitis (Nicolson & Anderson, 2003).

Marketing/ Government and Health Sectors:

The focused group technique is largely and pervasively used by marketing research companies, government departments, and the health sector. These focused groups can be used to justify decisions that have already been made. The researcher must be mindful of the potential of the focused groups to be co-opted by powerful lobbies (Festervand, 1985).

For example, such focused groups can be conducted by the Government authorities on young offenders to elicit the views of children and young people in custody and the findings can be used to inform policy and practice (Lyon et al., 2000).

Health Education Programmes:

Focused group work is also carried out to access perspectives in order to plan appropriate and effective interventions. Focused groups are especially well suited to -

- informing the development of health education programmes (Branco & Kaskutas, 2001; Halloran & Grimes, 1995) and
- developing culturally sensitive interventions (Wilcher et al., 2002; Vincent et al., 2006).

Social Research:

The focused group technique is widely and actively adopted by social scientists from a variety of disciplines with an overtly sociological focus. Examples of this are research works by Crossley (2002, 2003) and O'Brien et al. (2005) -

- Crossley (2002, 2003) studied women's views of and responses to health promotion to explore how women constructed health and health-related behaviours as moral phenomena.
- On the other hand, O'Brien et al. (2005) used focused groups to explore the role of constructions of masculinity in explaining men's help-seeking behaviour in relation to medical care.

Linhorst (2002) also reflects on the potential of focused groups for developing social work research.

Business Studies:

Foucsed groups have been used in the field of business studies in order to provide insights into the succession strategies of small and medium-sized business owners (Blackburn & Strokes, 2000).

Other Disciplinary Research:

There are yet some other disciplines that explored the possible use of focused groups. They are:

- occupational therapy (Hollis et al., 2002),
- family and consumer science research (Garrison et al., 1999),
- community practice (Harvey-Jordan & Long, 2002) and
- pediatric health research (Heary & Hennessy, 2002).

The use of focused groups has also been proven to provide insights into a huge variety of research questions. It includes:

- Public perspectives on recycling (Hunter, 2001),
- Ministry to new members of an episcopal congregation (Scannell, 2003), and
- Understanding ethical investment decision-making (Lewis, 2001).

Also, the focused groups are used in the academic research area, though surprisingly accompanied by increasing confusion. Thus, there is a huge scope of applications of the focused groups, irrespective of the topic area and discipline.

However, they are used in different ways in different disciplines. The way they will differ in different disciplines is in terms of – the sort of research questions posed, the content of topic guides, the questioning style of the moderator, the approach to data analysis, the way in which findings are presented and the use to which findings are put.

Uses of the focused groups:

- Focused groups have most frequently been used within the context of quantitative studies for developing and refining research instruments.
- Some researchers have also used exploratory focused groups alongside other qualitative methods. For example –

  Lichtenstein (2005) used focused groups with women in order to develop a definition of ‘domestic violence’, which was subsequently used in one-to-one interviews.

- Studies carried out by O’Brien (1993), Amos et al. (1997), McLeod et al. (2000), Wacherbarth (2002), and Stanley et al. (2003) are some of

the examples of focused groups used during the preliminary phase of studies to develop items for inclusion in questionnaires.

- Focused groups have also been used to adapt surveys for other populations (Fuller et al., 1993) and to formulate contextually relevant questions (Dumka et al., 1998).

- They have been employed to provide a basis for designing culturally sensitive survey methodology (Hughes & DuMont, 2002), often for minority ethnic groups (Murdaugh et al., 2002; Wilcher et al., 2002).

- They have been used by many researchers to inform the development of survey instruments because they allow researchers to connect the insights of participants as they pursue draft questionnaires.

- Despite the skepticism, focused groups have also been used to address topics considered 'sensitive' in a wide range of 'difficult' situations with groups viewed as potentially vulnerable.

- Some examples of such focused groups are:

    - research into sexual behaviour (Frith, 2000);

    - views of abortion and contraceptive habits of Swedish schoolgirls along with sexual behaviour (Ekstrand et al., 2005),

    - views of people with serious mental health problems (Koppelman & Bourjolly, 2001; Lester et al., 2005), and

    - topics, such as end-of-life care for those who are terminally ill (Raynes et al., 2000; Clayton et al., 2005).

- Côte-Arsenault and Morrison-Beedy (1999) suggested that researchers can elicit participants' narratives through focused group discussions using smaller groups, although it is an ill-advised use of focused groups in eliciting narratives.

- Morgan (1988) advocated the use of focused groups as the respondents might find face-to-face interaction intimidating in one-to-one interviews.

- According to Kitzinger (1995), individuals in some cases may otherwise be reluctant to talk about their experiences due to feeling that they have little to contribute to a research project. In such situations, focused groups can be used which may encourage the participation of such persons.

- Some of the examples of uses of focused groups in exploratory studies with 'Why not...?' – type questions are –

    - illuminating immunization behaviour (Keane et al., 1996),

    - providing a greater understanding of apparently illogical health-related behaviours, such as smoking whilst pregnant (Hotham et

al., 2002) and lack of adherence to asthma management protocols (George et al., 2003).

- On the other hand, Bloor et al. (2001) argued that focused groups can be used as a method of choice only when one wants to study group norms, group meanings and group processes.
- Focused groups have been frequently used in measuring the impact of health promotion campaigns (Halloran & Grimes, 1995), since they are well suited to uncovering the participants' misconceptions and how they can arise.
- Focused groups can be successfully and helpfully used with some other useful techniques in combination to conduct studies in certain areas.
- They can be used with one-to-one interviews and their mixture is most appropriate in cross-cultural or cross-racial research and in correctional institutions, where issues of power and disclosure are enlarged (Pollack, 2003, p. 472).
- Several researchers (eg., Wolff et al., 1993) argued that focused groups are useful complementary methods and should not be seen as mutually exclusive approaches.
- The focused group method can also be used with quantitative methods (see Flick, 2007).

Prohibited use of focused groups:

Though focused groups are used widely and successfully as mentioned through various examples, there are certain situations wherein they should not be used. Let us also understand such cases –

- It is sometimes argued that the focused groups are not suitable for eliciting experiences with regard to sensitive topics, which is a questionable assumption.
- The use of the focused groups is ill-advised or prohibited sometimes in accessing narratives, and often in accessing 'attitudes'.
- Focused groups cannot be used as a method of first choice for eliciting individuals' narratives, because many people may be reluctant to share their experiences in a group setting.
- They are not an appropriate method if one wants to measure the attitudes of the participants, as the attitudes are 'performed' as argued by Puchta and Potter (2002).

Advantages of Focused Groups:

- Focused groups can be used as a stand-alone method.

- They can also be integrated into multimethods design with other qualitative methods and sometimes with quantitative methods.
- They are a strong alternative to using single interviews as the data basis for qualitative analysis.
- They have been utilized in order to explore problematic areas of professional practice.
- They allow an analysis of both – statements and reports about experiences and events, and the interactional context in which these statements and reports are produced.
- They can be a powerful public relations tool.
- They can give a voice to marginalized groups, as well as can be used with more privileged sectors of society (Barbour, 1995).
- They may be helpful in eliciting the narratives of the group participants.
- They may encourage the participation of reluctant individuals, who otherwise may not talk about their experiences in one-to-one interviews.
- They also may allow the researchers to engage with reluctant respondents to encourage and help them elaborate on their perspectives and experiences.
- They may also be helpful in accessing 'hard to reach' or marginalized people and providing insights into their experience.
- They also can be used as a data collection tool and an intervention simultaneously (Crabtree et al., 1993, p. 146).
- They offer insights into how people process and make sense of the information with which they are provided.
- They are especially well suited to uncovering participants' misconceptions and how they can arise.
- Focused groups also may have some advantages over observational fieldwork which are more laborious and opportunistic.
- They provide concentrated and detailed information on an area of group life which is only occasionally, briefly, and abundantly available to the ethnographer over months and years of fieldwork (Bloor et al., 2001, p. 6).
- They also provide a valuable resource for documenting the complex and varying processes through which group norms and meanings are shaped, elaborated and applied (Bloor et al., 2001; p. 17).

- Focused groups provide an opportunity to generate data that are agreeable to analysis within the symbolic interactionist approach, which emphasizes the active construction of meaning.

  [Symbolic interactionism is associated with early versions of the qualitative approach, which emphasized the active aspects of human social life (Seale, 1999).]

- Focused groups allow the researchers to subtly set people off against each other and explore participants' differing opinions (Frey & Fontana, 1993).

- They do not force all participants to answer all questions and allow them to decide what they want to share and what they wish to keep private.

Disadvantages of Focused groups:

The focused group method is used with specific practical and methodological demands of documenting and analyzing the data.

One may face the following practical issues related to:

- sampling,
- documentation and moderating in focus groups,
- ethics and misuse of focused groups as a method,
- making sense of focused group data, and
- assessing the quality of data and their analysis.
- The use of focused groups may involve additional costs, such as – travel, room hire, refreshments and transcription, as pointed out by some researchers (Morgan & Krueger, 1993; Jackson, 1998; Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999; and MacLeod Clark et al., 1996).
- They also may cost further in terms of the researchers' time spent telephoning participants to ensure their participation, matching the required characteristics for group composition and availability of potential participants.
- The very presence of the researcher possibly can have an impact on group membership. Thus, it is questionable – to what extent any group that includes a researcher can be assumed to be entirely naturally occurring.

Strengths of Focused Groups:

- Focused groups with women are thought to certainly provide an excellent forum for discussing and questioning gendered aspects of their experiences and can transform the 'personal troubles' of women into 'public issues' (Barbour, 2007).

- They have earned a reputation, because of their perceived informality and growing public acceptability, in terms of their capacity to engage with those who may otherwise slip through the net of surveys or studies that rely on recruiting those who are in contact with services.
- Focused groups' strength of accessing marginalized people has frequently been utilized for developing culturally sensitive survey instruments.
- They have been regularly used by researchers as a method of choice to access groups viewed as 'hard to reach', such as –
  - members of ethnic minority groups (Chiu & Knight, 1999),
  - urban youth (Rosenfeld et al., 1996), and
  - migrants (Ruppenthal et al., 2005).
- Focused groups can encourage greater frankness (Krueger, 1994) and allow participants to talk about issues that are usually not raised, especially if groups have been convened to reflect some attribute or experience that sets them apart from others, thus providing 'security in numbers' (Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999).
- The added potential of the focused groups particularly for the practitioner-researchers is their use in overtly action-research-oriented projects.
- They are capable of capturing responses to events as they unfold.
- They are also capable of exploring "Why not…?" – type questions. Therefore, they have frequently been used to investigate non-take-up of health care services or 'non-compliance'.
- Focused groups are particularly well suited to studying decision-making processes and the way in which people weigh up competing priorities or the ways in which they qualify their views to consider situational and circumstantial factors.
- Focused groups have the potential for therapeutic use in providing insights to participants as well as researchers. According to Crabtree et al. (1993, p. 146), focused groups help people recognize previously hidden parts of themselves in others and reconstruct their own life narrative from others' stories.
- On the other hand, based on the purpose of research, predispositions, and researchers' expertise, researchers can use the focused group method for therapeutic effect or to clarify similarities and differences in experiences and accounts.
- Focused groups do extremely well at allowing us to study the processes of attitude formation and the mechanisms involved in interrogating and modifying views.

- They have a unique capacity to provide an understanding of how participants' views are formed.
- According to David Morgan (1988, p. 25), focused groups are useful when it comes to investigating what participants think, but they excel at uncovering why participants think as they do.
- Focused groups often involve lengthy and in-depth consideration of open-ended questions and stimulus materials, and therefore they are capable of reflecting issues and concerns salient to participants rather than closely following the researcher's agenda.
- With thoughtful sampling, focused groups can be a particularly effective tool for interrogating the very relationship between agency and structure.
- According to Callaghan (2005), focused groups provide an opportunity for participants to manage their identities and make a collective representation to the researcher simultaneously. Thus, they provide valuable insights into the construction of meanings and their impact on action.
- Carefully selected focused groups can access knowledge which represents the "habitus" of the wider community (Callaghan, 2005). Coined by Bourdieu (1990), the term habitus refers to 'dispositions' or lenses through which individuals view the world, which are 'socially constituted' and 'acquired' (Bourdieu, 1990).
- Focused groups may be an attractive option for those who are otherwise isolated or who crave the opportunity to talk to other people in the same situation as themselves, especially when no relevant support groups are available.
- They are helpful when starting with non-threatening questions and progressing to the more sensitive ones.

Limitations of Focused Groups:

- Overall, there may be ethical issues involved in using participants' time and energy to produce theorized accounts that are of little practical relevance to them, and this may be the ultimate betrayal of the respondents' confidence (Barbour, 1999b).
- There are likely to be limits to what can be achieved even by the most overtly participatory research. Therefore, researchers should be mindful while balancing their own disciplinary interests and the political interests of those they research.
- Inappropriate use of focused groups can result in poorly designed research (Krueger, 1993) as well as can threaten to discredit the method itself.

- Focused groups are not the most reliable way of either selecting participants or procuring information regarding their attitudes, when researchers intend to make statistical generalizations.

- A close analysis of focused group discussion highlights inconsistencies and contradictions if one views attitudes as fixed.

- Focused groups fail to provide reliable measures of participants' views.

Focused groups are known as group interviews, focused group interviews, and focused group discussions and these different terms are used interchangeably. In a group interview, generally, the group participants are asked the same questions or a list of questions in turn.

On the other hand, a focused group interview is known to be an interesting hybrid term and suggests that the object of the exercise is to interview a group, which is seen to have agreement on the same view.

However, they cannot be used as a substitute for phenomenological or ethnographic research (Kidd & Parshall, 2000).

Common myths/ misconceptions about focused groups:

- Focused groups allow researchers to carry out research more quickly and more cheaply than other methods.

- Focused groups provide a cheaper way to conduct research that is equivalent to a survey.

There are many problems and frustrations encountered by focused group researchers and perceived weaknesses of the method. However, it is believed that they all can turn into advantages of the method once the focused groups are placed within their rightful context of qualitative research.

Challenges for Focused Group Discussion:

- Researchers may face difficulties in summarizing a 'group view', though many focused group discussions may arrive at a consensus.

- For example, it raises a challenge – with approaches designed to develop consensus guidelines – for research that aims to understand differences in emphasis and understanding of various groups.

- It is difficult to handle focused group discussion, especially when participants frequently change their minds about issues in the course of discussion, particularly where focused groups address a topic to which they had not previously paid great attention.

- Demonstrating that participants are telling 'the truth' is frequently difficult by using the focused group discussion method, since it

involves the additional fear of peer group disapproval (Smithson, 2000).

- Recruiting focused group participants is a difficult task, which involves making a number of pragmatic and ethical decisions. In this case, the help of gatekeepers (i.e., people who are in contact with participants on a frequent basis, e.g., teachers, parents, guardians, etc. in the case of students) can be sought as their role is particularly important with regard to recruiting participants for focused group studies.

- Handling ethical issues involved in recruiting focused group participants, such as paying the participants a small amount, offering them gift tokens or providing them food, reimbursing their travel or respite care expenses, etc. as an expression of gratitude for their willing participation may become difficult, especially considering religious, cultural aspects. Also, this is because many university accounts departments will require the personal details of the recipients for their internal procedures, when finances are involved.

5.1.1 Focused Group Discussion:

The term focus group discussion or the focused group discussion is more commonly used relying on generating and analyzing the interaction between participants, rather than asking the same question or a list of questions to each group participant in turn.

In a focused group discussion, one ensures that the group participants have enough in common with each other. This, in turn, ensures that though the group participants have sufficiently varying experiences or perspectives in the context of some debate or differences of opinion, discussion between them is still appropriate. The nature of the focused group discussion is such that stories are unlikely to open up sequentially, as they can do in a one-to-one interview. This may lead to a confusing picture and frustrating attempts to analyze data.

Thus, according to Barbour (2007), focused group discussion can be defined as "any group discussion may be called a focus group as long as the researcher is actively encouraging and attentive to the group interaction" (Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999). According to him, this definition is suitably broad to encompass considerably all usages of this method. Côte-Arsenault and Morrison-Beedy (1999) suggested that it is possible to elicit narrative through focused group discussions if the researchers use smaller groups.

According to Wilkinson (1999), focused group discussions can provide insight into the processes that otherwise remain hidden and are difficult to enter. She further argues that during the focused group discussion, typically collective sense is made, meanings are negotiated, and identities are elaborated through the processes of social interaction between people (Wilkinson, 1999, p. 225).

5.1.2 Focused Group Researchers and/or Moderators:

The focused group researchers' role in the focused group discussion right from the beginning is related to:

- Explaining the purpose of the group to the group participants,
- Reassuring the participants regarding their anonymity, including securing agreement from group participants or members that they will respect confidentiality.
- Allowing some time to group participants for introduction as a normal rule of courtesy in social encounters.
- Actively encouraging group interaction,
- Ensuring that participants talk amongst themselves rather than interacting only with the researcher, or 'moderator',
- Preparing to develop a topic guide and select stimulus material that will encourage interaction, as well as decisions made with regard to group composition,
- Being attentive to group interaction, which refers to the process of moderating discussions,
- Picking up the differences in views or emphasis of participants and exploring those differences.
- Paying attention to group interaction, to group dynamics and to the activities in which groups are engaged
- Developing an explanatory framework,
- Interpreting health promotion messages,
- Weighing up competing priorities.
- Being flexible with regard to where they conduct focused groups in order to maximize participation
- Considering the ordering of questions, which will more efficiently use the time of the moderator as well as the transcriber.
- Exploring views or experiences by strategically placing items to add humour, especially where many variables are involved (Murphy et al., 1992).
- Tolerating silence during focused group discussion by avoiding the temptation to rush into using prompts. This silent gap, in fact, could be a sign that the participants are still thinking about the researcher's or moderator's question and formulating their answers (Barbour et al., 2000).

- Being prepared to change the sequence of questions in response to the issues raised by the interviewee.

- Remaining alert to pick up on any potentially interesting comments from participants.

The help of skilled moderators can be sought while conducting focused group discussions who are as competent as researchers. Moderators should possess the skills related to the following:

- Anticipating common problems and having strategies for dealing with them,

- Facilitating the group, and not controlling it (Bloor et al., 2001),

- Becoming comfortable with using a semi-structured topic guide to have control over the sequence and content of questioning, as other group members may ask questions to others out of the intended sequence and more sensitive ones than those that the researcher had decided to use.

As with all other qualitative methods, the personality of the researchers or moderators involved in focused groups has an impact on the form and content of data elicited using the focused groups. Hence, data generated by different researchers or moderators can be different in content and form.

Most health services and social sciences research involving focused group discussions are likely to aim at developing a greater understanding of the process rather than predicting an outcome in terms of the likely public response to a new product or marketing campaign.

5.1.3 Sampling/ Forming the Groups for Focused Group Discussion:

A group is the main unit in focused group discussion. Hence, sampling is crucial as it is important and enables us to compare using the obtained data through focused group discussion. The purpose of qualitative sampling is to reflect the diversity within the group or population under study rather than aspiring to recruit a representative sample (Kuzel, 1992; Mays & Pope, 1995). However, the process of recruiting a sample to fit the desired sampling can be time-consuming.

Below some important aspects are noted down which should be considered while sampling and forming the groups for focused group discussion. Though some aspects have been noted down in the context of marketing research, they are almost equally applicable to research studies through focused group discussions in many other fields.

Important aspects to be considered in sampling:

- Consider any identified ‘outlier’ individuals (i.e., individuals at extremes or exceptional individuals) rather than considering a number of such outliers.

- Incorporate such individuals into subgroups to get the most benefit out of them for the study rather than dismissing them as done in the sampling of quantitative research studies.
- Do not exclude outliers from the sample as they can provide insights being exceptional cases and have the potential to throw into sharp focus some of the taken-for-granted assumptions or processes that are otherwise not taken into account.
- Focused groups should be homogeneous in terms of background and not attitudes (Morgan, 1988).
- Avoid mixing such people in the focused groups who are known to have violently differing perspectives on emotive issues. This will enable both – focused group facilitators and participants – to clarify their own and others' perspectives and facilitate greater mutual understanding between them.
- More than one focused group discussion can be conducted based on the comparisons researchers wish to make.
- Some inter-group comparisons can be made by forming different groups based on different constellations of characteristics that individual participant possesses, such as age, gender, socioeconomic and educational background etc.
- As indicated by many of the earlier focused group texts, the ideal size of a group is 10-12 people in marketing research.
- The number of people in the groups will also depend on the skill of the moderator as well as the level and complexity of the desired discussion as suggested for the marketing research.
- It is also suggested that a maximum of eight participants is generally quite challenging enough both in terms of moderating groups and analyzing transcripts.
- In terms of a minimum number of participants, conducting a focused group discussion with three or four participants is also considered to be perfectly possible (Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999; Bloor et al., 2001) which may be preferable for some topics.
- The size of the group, that is the number of group participants, also can be determined based on the size and layout of the room available for a group session.
- It is consistently advised to recruit groups of strangers in marketing research, so that focused groups should appear as naturally occurring groups.
- Use of the pre-existing groups in marketing research can be problematic as they are likely to skew the findings in favour of

subgroups within the population, and using such groups raises important ethical issues, particularly with regard to ensuring confidentiality.

- The decision as to whether to incorporate or avoid pre-existing groupings depends on the scope of the research project in question.
- It is stressed as an important need that the participants should be reminded that the group discussion is for a research study and to distinguish this from a decision-making forum or planning committee (Krueger, 1994).

5.1.4 Recording Methods for Focused Group Discussion:

The most common methods that are used in focused group discussions involve note-taking, reports from moderators and memory-based analysis. These approaches are appropriate for certain limited research applications (Krueger, 1994). However, they are unsatisfactory for academic research (Bloor et al., 2001; Kidd & Parshall, 2000).

Here, we will discuss two widely used methods for conducting focused group discussions:

1. Recording and transcribing:

A good quality recorder is essential to recording a session. Possibly, it is best to position the recorder and microphone on a table in the centre of the group. However, wall-mounted microphones may be preferable for some groups, such as elderly, disabled people (Barrett & Kirk, 2000) or children (Kennedy et al., 2001).

Video recording of the focused group discussion is considered the most accurate method to capture all important verbal and non-verbal communication and to identify individual speakers. However, it has the potential to increase participants' discomfort or self-consciousness, difficulty in anonymizing individuals, and logistical challenges with regard to positioning cameras, the capacity to capture all participants on film and limitations on the number of participants that can be accommodated.

Occasionally, in some situations, researchers should be prepared to take notes, when participants are not agreeable to you recording their discussion.

2. Note-taking:

Like all qualitative research studies, it is advised that the researchers should record their immediate observations about the focused group discussions and note any salient features of group dynamics, and their own impressions of the topics that most engaged participants. It should include referring to any theoretical frameworks, or other research studies that may be particularly relevant as this will help researchers reconstruct their

emergent explanations at a later date, reminding them of certain issues or themes to which they were sensitized.

5.2 EXERCISE TO PERFORM: CONDUCTING A FOCUSED GROUP DISCUSSION

In this section, we will see how the focused group discussion is conducted. For this, you will need to follow the following steps – selecting the team, selecting the participants, deciding on time and location, preparing for and conducting focus group discussion, and submitting a report as a part of your academic course.

As we have discussed earlier in detail about focused group discussion, here are a few precautions that we should take as researchers while conducting focused groups and writing a report on a discussion:

- To make sure that the topic for conducting focused group discussion is not very difficult for you to handle considering your current academic level.
- To make sure that the group size is not too large to handle.
- To make sure that the ethical protocol is being followed.
    - Consent of the participants is obtained before starting the conduction of the focused group discussion.
    - Participants are made aware of their right to withdraw from the discussion.
    - They are offered the freedom to maintain their anonymity by not mentioning their names.
    - Participants are assured that their personal data/ information will not be shared or published anywhere without their permission following the ethical principles of privacy and confidentiality and that only group data will be shared.
    - Permission is obtained from the participants if you plan to tape-record/video-record the discussion for your further ease.
- To encourage discussion among the group participants by asking a few leading questions.
- To make sure that the discussion is in the right direction and that all participants are getting involved in the discussion.
- To make sure that more information is being yielded from the participants.
- To make sure that we are asking minimum questions that are relevant and have the potential to yield the maximum information

that we seek to obtain.

- Report writing on focused group discussion should be written in the past tense keeping in mind that the activity has been already done.
- Report writing on each focused group discussion should not exceed 4 to 5 pages. Instead of writing your stories on discussion, write the reports objectively, keeping all your biases and prejudices aside.

Since this is a discussion, there is no such strict format to follow. However, we will see here one example in which we will see some questions that will provide you insight into what kind of questions can be asked. This example will also provide a structure/format to write a report on the focus group discussion that you will be conducting or might have conducted already.

This example of report-writing is hypothetical just to give you an idea about how it can be written. Make sure that you are reporting each and every single detail of the discussion to make it qualitative and informative. However, this should be done very carefully, especially when you are about to share some sensitive information about any participant. In this case, you should make sure that the anonymity of that participant has been maintained if and only if that sensitive information is important to mention in the report.

Purpose of focus group discussion: To study financial management among earning and non-earning women

Participants: Earning and non-earning women

Age: 25 to 40

Number of participants: 10

Description of participants: Participants included homemakers, business persons/ entrepreneurs, and authorities from different institutions.

Rationale for conducting focused group discussion: In Indian society, women often face difficulty in financial management (whether at the personal level or family level), especially those who are non-earning. This discussion was conducted to study the kind of difficulty faced by them.

Report on focused group discussion: (Here, each question asked by the researcher will be mentioned. The responses of the participants will be noted down after each question reflecting their views and experiences about the issue that was being studied through group discussion. Here, we will see report writing based on a sample of two hypothetical questions. While opening up the discussion in writing you may need to start with some introduction based on how the discussion took place.)

As the topic mentions, the present focused group discussion was conducted to study the financial management of the earning and non-earning women in India, aged 25 to 40 – both at personal and family levels. In order to avoid complexity the number of participants was restricted up to 10. Participants included homemakers, business persons/ entrepreneurs, and authorities from different institutions, such as academic, private and public/government sectors as representatives of their categories. No education criteria were considered so that women with different educational levels would be able to participate and contribute to the results of the discussion.

Before starting the conduction of the focused group discussion, each participant was asked to introduce themselves, wherein all participants were made comfortable. After a few minutes of rapport building, consent from all participants was obtained regarding their willing participation in the focused group discussion. However, they were also made aware of their right that they were free to leave the discussion at any point whenever they wanted. They were assured that no personal information shared by them would be shared or published outside. Rather it would be used for research purposes only and their anonymity would be respected. Besides, permission for an audio recording of the discussion was also sought from them to gain their trust and the maximum cooperation from them.

After making sure that all precautions had been taken and that participants were ready for discussion, the discussion was started by asking the participants the following questions, one after another, considering the progress of the discussion and the relevance of the question to bring back the discussion on track as required. The seating arrangement of the participants was done in such a way that all 10 participants could face each other and communicate with each other as well as the researcher without any physical barrier. At the same time, it was also made sure that the same distance was maintained between them.

After all preparation was done, the discussion was opened with the first question, "Do you face/ have you ever faced any problems while managing financial matters?" As expected, there was an affirmative answer from the participants. That is, all participants had faced some kind of issues frequently or at least once in their lifetime regarding financial management.

This leading question led to the next question from the researcher, "What kind of problems they have faced or still face?" Following this question, participants started to share their past experiences regarding financial management. The responses of the participants reflected that not only non-earning women faced issues regarding financial management, but also earning women faced more or less the same issues. Especially, when husbands of non-earning women were earning less, they had difficulty managing the expenditure for running home affairs. This expenditure commonly included spending money on

grocery items, fees for children's schooling, clothing for all family members, rent of the house, etc. which are recurring in nature. This led to difficulty in saving an amount on a regular basis of which participants could think hardly because no sufficient amount is left once the recurrent expenditure is done. Thus, this was a regular 'headache' for the participants – 'how to save money for emergencies, sudden illnesses, etc.?' This often led them to think about taking loans or borrowing money from people in their circle. But even asking someone for money was an embarrassing situation for them. These non-earning participants even regretted not being earning members to support their families financially, especially those who were non-educated or less educated. Even most of the participants were from the conservative family background due to which some of them were not allowed by their in-laws family to work outside. In the case of earning women, they were expected to spend their all money on their current, that is, the in-law's family, rather than their parental family. So, those earning participants who couldn't spend their money on their parental family's needs often felt guilt feelings or had to manage to give some amount to their parents without letting the in-law's family know about it. This was again a difficult situation for them. Again, investing some amount of money was not impossible for them, it was surely difficult to manage earning participants after managing the recurrent expenditure for the family. This was difficult for especially those participants, who were the only earning members of the family after their deceased husband or when their husbands were addicted badly.

(This way the questions asked to the participants continue further till the last question with the responses of the participants to the questions, along with some significant responses which may reflect the depth of the issue in the participants' lives. As shown in the example, you should mention the response of the group, maintaining anonymity, privacy and confidentiality of the individual participant. Even if the significant response of the individual participant is mentioned in the report, you should not mention the name of the participant or any of his or her identity-related clues anywhere in the report.)

General feedback by the participants (if any): Participants appreciated the topic and the way the discussion was handled by the researcher. They expressed the need for such discussions to be conducted so that people should be able to share their views and experiences.

Your observations about or overall remark on focused group discussion (if any): Participants were quite cooperative. Some participants were a bit apprehensive at the beginning of the discussion. However, they also started sharing their experiences very openly and freely when the discussion progressed further.

The focused group has a very vast scope of applications in a variety of fields. We have tried to cover almost all basic information about it which will be helpful to you while writing your reports on focused group discussions at this stage. We have looked at its usages, advantages, disadvantages, strengths, limitations, etc. We have also covered some points on Dos and Don't's which should be kept in mind while writing reports. Beyond this, you will need to seek more knowledge about it through extra readings to get expertise on how to use this focused group technique more independently to accomplish your set research goal as an independent researcher.

5.3 SUMMARY

Like interviews, focused groups have become one of the important methods for qualitative research. Focused group methods emerged in the 1940s and became the foundation of broadcasting, marketing, and public opinion research in the post-Second World War period. They gained considerable popularity also within organizational research and development.

Focused groups have large applications in various fields like community development, marketing, government and health sectors, health services, health education programmes, social research, business studies, and other disciplinary research. They are used in different ways in different disciplines.

Subsequently, we have seen the uses, prohibited uses, advantages, disadvantages, strengths and limitations of the focused groups. We have also seen the challenges in using the focused group technique.

Sections 5.1.1 through 5.1.4 describe the focused group discussion technique even further, explaining its technical aspects, like the role of researchers/moderators in it along with their personality and their overall presence, sampling/ forming the groups for the focused group discussions, and two recording methods widely used for focused group discussions.

Section 5.2 provides an exercise to conduct focused group discussions along with some useful technical tips. It also provides the hypothetical example in a format/ structure - the way you may report the focused group discussions that you have conducted.

5.4 QUESTIONS

1. Describe the focused groups and their applications in various fields.
2. What are the uses and prohibited uses of the focused groups?

3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the focused groups?
4. What are the strengths and limitations of the focused groups?
5. What are the myths about focused groups and the challenges in using focused groups?
6. Write short notes:

a) Focused group discussion

b) Focused group researchers/ moderators

c) Sampling/ forming the groups for the focused group discussions

d) Recording Methods for Focused Group Discussion

5.5 REFERENCES

- Barbour, R. (2007). Doing focus groups. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

*****