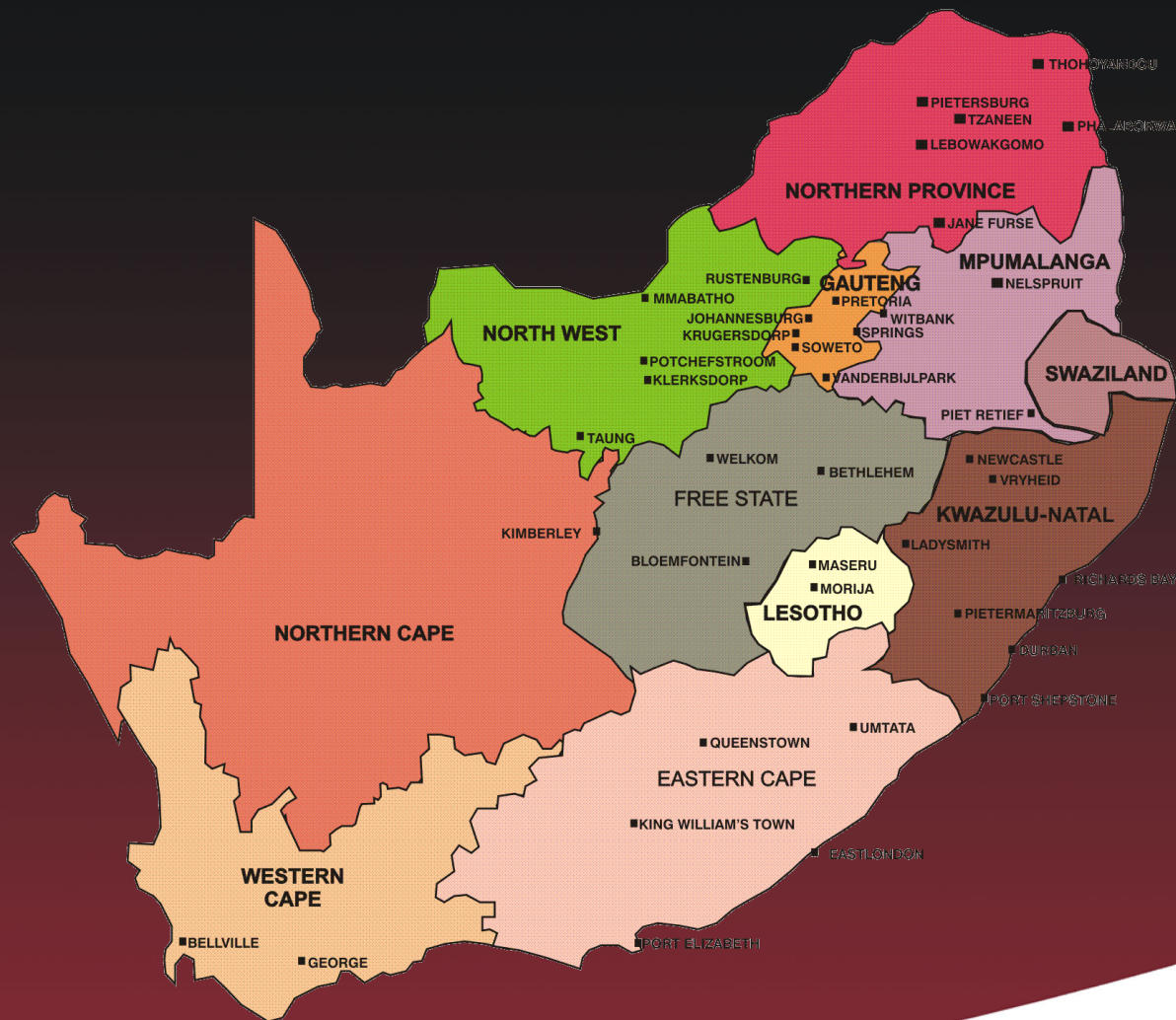




The research process with reference to the research method section

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this presentation the focus will be on the research method section of the total research process. In order to place research method in perspective it has to fit into the research process as such. The developed schematic presentation on research method will be discussed with emphasis on research purposes and research design. The rest of the topics will be mentioned as part of the total research method section of the research process. It has to be stressed that the content of this presentation is my personal opinion derived at after studying many research texts over many years. Any psycho-social researcher will agree that there do not exist only one opinion on these matters and opinions are often contradictory which does not make it easier for the prospective researcher. This presentation does not claim to be all encompassing and therefore no exhaustive list of for instance research designs are given and discussed.

2. RESEARCH PROCESS

The research process differs much and some authors distinguish 8 or more phases, while others have 5 or 6 phases. In a study done on the viewpoints of various authors (Babbie & Mouton, 2009; Lune et al., 2010; Monette et al., 2011; Royse, 2011; Rubin & Babbie, 2010; Thyer, 2010) the following 6 phases of the research process seems appropriate for the purpose of this presentation.

RESEARCH PROCESS

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS



RESEARCH METHOD



DATA COLLECTION



DATA ANALYSIS



INTERPRETATION OF DATA



WRITING THE RESEARCH REPORT

From this departure point the focus will be on the research method section of the research process specifically.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

My opinion of the research method section of the research process can be delineated as following in a schematic fashion.

RESEARCH METHOD (STEP 2 OF THE PROCESS)

EPISTEMOLOGICAL-ONTOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS



THEORETICAL MODELS



KIND OF RESEARCH



APPROACH OR PERSPECTIVE



LITERATURE STUDY



PURPOSES



DESIGN



PARTICIPANTS/SUBJECTS



MEASURING INSTRUMENTS



PROCEDURE



ETHICAL ASPECTS



MANNER OF DATA ANALYSIS

The focus will now turn to the two highlighted sections in the schema, while the other sections will only be referred to. The next number of sources were used to delineate the research method section (Adler & Clark, 2008; Alasuutari et al., 2009; Babbie, 2010; Babbie & Mouton, 2009; Cozby, 2009; Creswell, 2009; Engel & Schutt, 2010; Gomm, 2009; Monette et al., 2011; Pierson & Thomas, 2010; Rubin & Babbie, 2010; Trochim, 2006).

3.1 Epistemological-ontological assumptions

The researcher will have to mention the assumption to be used in the study whether it would for instance be Positivism, Post-positivism, the Interpretive paradigm, the Critical paradigm or Constructivism.

3.2 Theoretical models

The researcher will now have to decide on the theoretical model to be used for the study such as Systems theory, the Strengths approach, the Narrative approach, Crisis intervention, the Task centered approach or the Ecosystems approach.

3.3 Kind of research

The kind of research must now be determined, whether it is basic, applied or integrated. Most research in Social Work, however, will be on an integrated level, seeing that Social work is by definition the integration of theory and practice.

3.4 Approach or perspective

According to the previous line of thought the researcher will have to decide whether the study is going to be qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods approach.

3.5 Literature study

The literature study in the quantitative paradigm should be done before the empirical study, while in the qualitative paradigm literature study should be done after the empirical study and is called literature control.

3.6 Purposes

Most authors distinguish four purposes of research, namely exploratory, descriptive, explanatory and evaluative purposes (Engel & Schutt, 2010; Neuman, 2006; Pierson & Thomas, 2010). More than one, and even all four, purposes can be delineated for the same study, but one will normally dominate a particular study. The explorative purpose will normally focus on what questions (what are the circumstances like in the community?), while the descriptive purpose will focus on the how and who question (who is homeless? and how many are homeless?).

In the explanatory purpose the why question should be answered and seeks to identify causes for and effects of behavior and are normally experimental in nature. The evaluation purpose focuses on program or practice evaluation and seeks to determine the effects of social policies, programs and interventions and thus actually encompasses the other three purposes (Rubin & Babbie, 2010).

As an example one might for instance conduct qualitative open-ended **exploratory** interviews with some community members as a first step towards evaluating what services the community need. Subsequently a quantitative **descriptive** survey might be done to evaluate the problems community members have and the services they need. The questions for this survey can partly be based on the open-ended answers of the first section of this particular study. An **explanatory** analysis might now be done to evaluate for instance why some groups from this community are more likely to utilize certain services. If you then would compile a program to address the community's needs, with a before and after measurement included, one can say that an **evaluation** purpose had been achieved.

3.7 Design

Babbie and Mouton (2009: 72) define design as the planning of scientific inquiry, meaning to specify as clearly as possible what you want to find out and to determine the best way to do so. Creswell and Plano-Clark (2007: 4) add that the research design is the plan of action that links the philosophical assumptions to specific methods. For the purpose of this presentation the term research design will refer to the specific design such as experimental or survey and the specific sub-design (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007; Pierson & Thomas, 2010; Trochim, 2006).

- Experimental design can be distinguished and specifically the classic experiment, the after test control group only and the Solomon four group as sub-designs. The quasi experiment can also be grouped in this category (Trochim, 2006).
- Single systems can be seen in the category of experimental research, except that single systems use one individual or group and do not have a control group (Strydom, 2011a).
- Survey design can be seen as a quantitative design and can have a number of sub-designs, such as the postal questionnaire, the structured interview, the telephonic interview and the group interview.
- In-depth interviewing can be regarded as a qualitative design and can be of a semi-structured or unstructured format.

- Focus groups are also of a qualitative nature and can be conducted in a semi-structured or unstructured form (Greeff, 2011).
- Document study and secondary analysis are often seen as similar. However, Strydom & Delport (2011) make the following distinction. Document study involves the study of existing documents, such as letters to friends or family, diaries, confessions, autobiographies, minutes of meetings and the mass media, while secondary analysis on the other hand refers to the reworking of already analyzed data in which the current researcher had no direct control over or involvement in.
- Participant observation can be done in the form of the total observer, the observer as participant, the participant as observer and the total participant on a continuum of involvement with participants (Strydom, 2011b).

- Program evaluation focuses on the practical situation, the evaluation of a program and to provide information that can be used to improve such programs (Royse et al., 2010).

3.8 Participants/subjects

In this section an explanation takes place on the number of subjects (in the case of quantitative research) or an estimation of the number of participants (in the case of qualitative research). In qualitative research it is not always possible to have a specific number of participants and will data-collection normally continues until proper data-saturation has been reached.

3.9 Measuring instruments

A discussion will take place on the measuring instrument/s to be used in the study, whether it is standardized measuring instruments, attitudinal scales, observation of behavior, personal scales and rating scales, diaries or unobtrusive measures.

3.10 Procedure

In this part of the research method the procedure or steps that will be followed during the research study will be discussed. For instance the researcher can say that ethical clearance will be gained, then participants will be recruited and then the actual design implemented.

3.11 Ethical issues

All applicable ethical issues such as privacy, confidentiality, debriefing and informed consent will be discussed with an application on the specific research scenario.

3.12 Manner of data analysis

In the case of quantitative research statistical analysis of data will be done, while in the case of qualitative research, data analysis will be done according to text analysis and analysis of narratives.

4. CONCLUSION

The focus of this presentation was on the research method section of the research process, and especially the purposes of research and the research design. Four purposes of research were delineated, namely exploratory, descriptive, explanatory and evaluative purpose. As far as research designs are concerned, the following were discussed, namely experimental, single systems, survey, in-depth interviewing, focus groups, document study and secondary analysis, and participant observation.

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Thank You

