

Social & Community Research

In this issue of WHYS Views, we take a multi-disciplinary approach to check out why social and community research would benefit from participatory action principles, narrative analysis and ethnography.

Participatory Action Research

The key to participatory action research is a high level of active involvement amongst the participants, in contrast to the passive state of “subjects” and “respondents” in some traditional research. To a certain extent, the “researched” become the “researchers”.

Participants are being consulted. In the process of exploration and understanding the issues, they make suggestions and find solutions for both the social organisations and themselves to work on. A strong sense of project ownership triggers a positive outlook of the research outcome and motivation to help remedy issues.

Narrative Approach

The value of using a narrative approach to social and community issues is clearly illustrated in this quote:

“While logico-scientific rationality may be useful for understanding chemistry or biology, its usefulness is very limited in studies of meaning and human action...

The world and people are like historical stories...

Why use narrative analysis? Because it provides a way of understanding human experience that is consistent with the way that people make sense of their own lives.”

Pranee Liamputtong & Douglas Ezzy

An open interviewing approach which encourages story telling allows participants to describe their life experiences from their own perspectives eliminating biases from a pre-structured approach.

Ethnography

Ethnographers and qualitative researchers share similar qualities – a desire to listen and a passion to inquire and understand people’s perspectives and way of life.

A traditional ethnographic approach involves living with and immersing in the lifestyle of the group under study. The essence is to assimilate the culture – its rules, norms and values, and thereby understand people’s needs, behaviours and perceptions.

The fundamental outcome is to apply the cultural learning to serve the research purpose from serving the community needs to identifying ways of modifying behaviours.

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