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# **UNIT 3 METHODS OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY**

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## **3.0 INTRODUCTION**

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Procedures for gathering information in any discipline are known as methods. The term methodology is used to refer to all aspects of the implementation of methods. Methodology for any discipline involves the development of procedures for making various kinds of observations which provide the building blocks for theories and generalisations. In this unit we will be dealing with the needs and aims as related to social psychology research. We will also be putting forward the methods of research in social psychology. Following this we will, be dealing with ethnography as a method in social psychology research. Finally we will impress upon the need for evaluation and how it is to be done.

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## **3.1 OBJECTIVES**

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After reading this unit, you will be able to:

Define social psychology research

- 1 Describe the various characteristic features of the social psychology methodology;

- 1 Explain the Needs and aims of social psychological research;
- 1 Differentiate between common sense explanations and scientific explanations;
- 1 Differentiate between the theoretical and applied research;
- 1 Analyse Various methods used in social psychology; and
- 1 Explain meta analysis.

## **3.2 SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH: NEEDS AND AIMS**

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As a Scientific discipline social psychology embraces following three operations:

- 1) Careful collection of observation or data.
- 2) Ordered integration of these observations into hypotheses and theories.
- 3) Tests of adequacy of these hypothesis and theories in terms of whether they can successfully predict future observations.

Each of these steps is indispensable if social psychology is to achieve mature status as an empirical science. As a method, empiricism advocates the collection and evaluation of data. Experimentation is the main source of empirical research. It is primarily guided by induction from observations rather than by deduction from theoretical constructs. Induction is process of reasoning in which general principle are inferred from specific cases. The experimental method is basically inductive in nature as the conclusions about populations are drawn from observations of individuals and small groups. The term '*data*' is a Latin word which means 'given'. The singular form '*datum*' refers to a single isolated fact. Since one isolated fact is of limited value in developing an understanding of the world, scientists usually deal with sets of observations described by 'data'.

How do we gain an understanding of human behaviours? There could be many ways. One might ask why people act as they do? And try to uncover their innermost thought and fantasies, read the works of great novelists and playwrights and by eminent philosophers and take part in the situation of interest. All these methods can yield valuable insight into people and social psychology has at times drawn ideas from all of them. How do we come to judge the accuracy of statements about human behaviours on the basis of these methods? For instance, consider the effect of violence in movies and television. Educators, public health authorities, broadcasters and behavioural scientists have long been concerned about their possible effects. There are two prevalent views—one group believes it harmful and states that violence in mass media increases the chances that the viewers will react aggressively. Others believe that violent scenes might be socially beneficial by draining the viewers' pent-up aggressive urges. Which of these should be taken as acceptable position on this socially significant subject? The validity of a statement is verified by relying on authorities. But the problem in this regard is, 'who is most qualified person'. Experts even disagree and we may find people on all sides; even authorities can be wrong at times.

Common sense is often relied upon to evaluate various ideas and actions. Common sense is usually based on widely shared experiences. But belief based on common sense can be wrong. Berkowitz (1986:27) has discussed an example from the

history of science, “what if you had two large balls, one a heavy bowling ball and the other same size but much lighter in weight and dropped both of them from the roof of a tall building? Common sense says that the heavier ball will reach the ground first. But in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century Stevin and Galileo demonstrated that bodies do not fall with velocities proportional to their weights.”

Some other problems with common sense are events may not happen in accord to our experience and erroneous tendency to believe that we know something all along.

The other problem in understanding events and things is distorted perceptions. Our perception of events in the environment can be in error. People often look at complex and ambiguous situation with preconceptions. Experiences and certain expectations also affect our perceptions. In 1966 Robert Rosenthal published a review of some of the notable mistakes that have been made in the history of science became of erroneous perceptions. One example was from Newton's research. Sir Isaac Newton failed to see certain lines in the solar spectrum produced when a glass of prism was held in front of a beam of light evidently because his theory did not anticipated those lines. “Our assumptions define and limit what we see, i.e. we tend to see things in such way that they will fit in with our assumptions even if this involve distortion or omission” (Johnson cited in Rosenthal, 1966: 6).

There is another problem of social psychological research is replication. Validity of an abstract statement is increased if the observations on which it is based are also reported by other qualified persons. Reproducibility is the most important criterion of a science. Other investigators must be able to duplicate the observations that are taken as a support of that idea.

### Self Assessment Questions

- 1) What are the three operations that social psychology embraces?

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- 2) What are the social psychology methods through which one gains understanding of human behaviour?

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- 3) What is common sense based on to understand human behaviour?

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- 4) How do distorted perceptions affect understanding events?

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### **3.3 METHODS: FORMULATING THE INVESTIGATION**

Every scientific investigation begins with a question. The question can be dictated by a practical problem or grow out of theoretical interest.

The difference between theoretical and applied research is not a qualitative one but rather a matter of degree (Feldman 1985: 21). Pure theoretical work in social psychology is aimed at the building of a basic body of knowledge and facts about the social world. While applied research is meant to provide immediate solutions to immediate problems. But both researches have relevance for each other.

Results of even the most applied studies are invariably used not only for their immediate applications to the problem at hand but also for their implication for theory. On the other hand, theories are able to suggest new approaches and strategies for dealing with the problems of society. But there is a difference of methods in theoretical and applied research. Theoretical studies are mostly conducted in laboratories using experiment and applied researches are based on natural field settings.

But the goal for both of them is same, “building knowledge, a concern regarding the quality of life and an interest in how knowledge of social psychology is ultimately utilised” (Feldman). While the paths to these goals may differ, depending on the orientation of a particular social psychologist, the interaction between theory and research is well recognised today. “Many psychologists working in an applied field are keenly aware of the need for close cooperation between theoretical and applied psychology. This can be accomplished in psychology....if the theorist does not look toward applied problems with high brow aversion or with a fear of social problems, and if the applied psychologist realizes that there is nothing so practical as a good theory” (Lewin 1951: 169).

The methods can be subdivided into two groups, voz., methods of data collection and methods of analysis.

#### **3.3.1 Methods of Data Collection**

Observations, the study of documents, questionnaire, interviews, testing and experiment etc.

#### **3.3.2 Methods of Analysis**

Statistical Methods: Correlational, Factor analysis

Logical and theoretical: Constructs of typology, various means of explanations etc.

- 1 Observational method
- 1 Correlation method
- 1 Experimental method
- 1 Ethnography

### **3.3.2.1 Observational Method**

Observation is the old method of social psychology. Many writers have used different terms and categories for this method like method of systematic observation (Morgan and King), direct observation (Hilgard and Atkinson) and Feldman has included it in field study.

Observation is to simply observe the phenomena under study as it occur naturally (Hilgard and Atkinson 2003: 21)

This method plays a very important role in the collection of data on overt behaviour and the actions of individuals. The main problem involved in the application of this method include, what to observe? How to fixate the observations? How to structure observation? What should be the units of observation in social psychological research, and the definite interval of time for observation?

This method proceeds in following two stages:

*Describing behaviour:* This methods starts with the observation of behaviours in natural setting that is relevant for the research. The observation may be based on the questions like what do people do? Can various behaviours be classified in systematic ways? How do people differ in their behaviors?

*From description to causes:* The method of systematic observation tells us what do people do and how they differ in their behaviours. It may also be used to find out what caused the observed behaviours. But one should to be cautious in inferring causes from observation as

A behaviour may have many causes

The fact that an event comes before another event do not show that the first event is the cause of the latter one.

To establish likely causes of even simple behaviour, a number of observations would be required.

For more complex behaviours, establishing likely cause is much more difficult.

Thus to find out the course of a particular behaviours, we must look carefully at the result of many observations, noting the effects of a particular factor.

Observational method can be relatively informal and unstructured or it can be formal and structured. But the object in each case in the same, “to abstract information from the complex flux of social behaviours that are of potential significance to the research questions; and to record each instance of such actions over some period” (Manstead A.S. R. Semin G.R. 2001: 97).

The nature of research setting or topic dictates that observation is conducted in a relatively informal and unstructured manner with the researcher posing as a member of the group being observed. A Classical example of research employing this method is Festinger, Riecken and Schachter's (1956) study of the consequences of blatant disconfirmation of strongly held beliefs. The investigators identified a religious sect which predicted that the northern hemisphere would be destroyed by flood on a certain date. By joining that sect, members of the research team were able to observe what happened when the predicted events failed to materialise? This is called participant observation. In such observation researcher participate in the ongoing activities of the people being observed.

Formal methods of observation can be used when it is possible to record actions relevant to the research question without disturbing the occurrence of behaviour.

In non-participant observation observers record people's behaviour but do not actually participates in their activities.

The most formal type of observational methods is one in which the researcher uses a predetermined category system for scoring social behaviors. Bales' (1950) Interaction Process analysis (IPA) is a well known example. Such a system was developed to study interaction in small groups. The verbal exchanges between group members are coded in terms of 12 predetermined categories. The scores of group members can then be used to determine who the leader of the group is.

Observational methods of data collection have two main advantages over the self report methods. They can often be made without disturbing the naturally occurring behaviours. Even where people know that they are being observed, enacting behavior may be quite engrossing.

Nevertheless, there are some types of behaviours that are either impossible to observe directly (because they took place in the past) or difficult to observe directly (because they are normally enacted in private). Moreover, social psychologists are often interested in measuring people's perceptions, cognitions or evaluations, none of which can be directly assessed simply through observation. For these self-report measures or other techniques are often used.

### **3.3.2.2 Correlation Method**

Correlation is a relationship between two (or more) variables such that systematic increase or decrease in the magnitude of one variable is accompanied by systematic increase or decrease in the magnitude of the others" ( Reber & Reber, 2001: 158).

Correlational investigations try to determine, 'what is the relationship among the variables of interest to the researcher?' The question is asked, 'as something changes in amount, how do other things vary? One may ask if wealthier people were happier than those who had little money.

A Correlational study of the connection between income and happiness thus inquires whether more money is associated with greater happiness (Positive correlation), or with lower happier (a negative correlation) or does not go along with happiness (a zero correlation). The degree of relationship is assessed mathematically and is expressed as a correlation coefficient ranging from +1.00

to -1.00. A positive correlation indicates that the scores on the two variables move in the same direction; as the scores rise (or fall) on one variable, they also rise or fall on the other variable. A negative correlation indicates that the score move in opposite directions: an increase in the scores on one variable is accompanied by a decrease in scores on the other. The magnitude of the obtained correlation reflects the degree of this relationship. The plus sign indicates a positive relation and the minus sign a negative correlation. The closer a correlation value comes to positive or negative 1.00, the stronger the relationship between two variables.

One of the most important points in understanding the result of correlation research is that finding a correlation between two variables does not in any way imply that two are linked causally. It may be that one variable causes the changes in the other, but it is just as plausible that it does not. It is even possible that some third, unmeasured and previously unconsidered variable is causing both variables to increase or decrease simultaneously. We can take the example of the possible relationship between television violence and viewer aggression. Because in most cases it is difficult to control adult viewers' television viewing habits, researcher must carry out correlation studies in which the aggressive content of television programs viewed by an individual is compared with the degree of aggressive behaviour that person carries out.

Suppose the results are supportive of the hypothesis that high aggressive content is associated with high viewer aggression and that low aggressive content is associated with low viewer aggression. Drawing the conclusion that aggressive behaviour caused the aggression would be inappropriate and quite possibly inaccurate.

It follows, then that although the use of correlation techniques allow us to learn what associations exist between two variables, it does not inform us about causality.

However there are some circumstances under which we could make reasonable inferences about the causal direction (Berkowitz), but their results may be only inferences and far from conclusive. We have to turn to other methods to ascertain causal relationship. Experimental techniques are generally the preferred means of doing such research. Still, in instances in which experiments cannot be conducted, correlational method can provide valuable information. We can compare both the methods on the following attributes:

**Table: Comparing Correlational and Experimental Research Methods**

| <b>Attributes</b>        | <b>Correlational Research</b> | <b>Experimental Research</b> |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Independent Variable     | Varies Naturally              | Controlled by researcher     |
| Unambiguous causality    | Yes                           | No                           |
| Exploratory              | Often                         | Usually not                  |
| Random Assignment        | No                            | Yes                          |
| Theory Testing           | Often                         | Usually                      |
| Tests many relationships | Usually                       | Usually Not                  |

### Self Assessment Questions

- 1) What are social psychology methods for formulating investigations?

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- 2) What are the two divisions into which methods are subdivided?

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- 3) What are the methods of data collection?

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- 4) Discuss observational method in detail.

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- 5) Discuss the correlational method. What are its advantages over observational method?

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#### 3.3.2.3 Experimental Method

Experimentation has been the dominant research method in social psychology, mainly because it is without equal as a method for testing theories that predict causal relationships between variables.

The goal of an experiment is to see what happens to a phenomenon, such as obedience, when the researcher deliberately modifies some features of the environment in which the phenomenon occurs (that is, if variable A is changed, will there be resulting changes in B). We can see the meanings of some basic concepts

of the experimental research in the table given below. We will focus our discussion on the experiments in social psychology.

**Table: Terminology in Experimental Research**

|                             |                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Experiment</b>           | <i>A well controlled test of hypothesis about cause and effect.</i>                                                                                       |
| <b>Hypothesis</b>           | <i>A statement about cause and effect that can be tested</i>                                                                                              |
| <b>Variable</b>             | <i>Something that can occur with different values and can be measured</i>                                                                                 |
| <b>Independent Variable</b> | <i>A variable that represents the hypothesised cause that is precisely controlled by the experimenter and independent of what the participant does</i>    |
| <b>Dependent Variable</b>   | <i>A variable that represents the hypothesised effect whose values ultimately depend on the value of the independent variable</i>                         |
| <b>Experimental Group</b>   | <i>A group in which the hypothesised cause is present</i>                                                                                                 |
| <b>Control Group</b>        | <i>A group in which the hypothesised effect is present</i>                                                                                                |
| <b>Statistics</b>           | <i>Mathematical techniques for determining the certainty with which a sample of data can be used to draw generalisations</i>                              |
| <b>Measurement</b>          | <i>A system for assigning numbers to different values of variables</i>                                                                                    |
| <b>Random Assignment</b>    | <i>A system for assigning participants to experimental and control groups so that each participant has an equal chance of being assigned to any group</i> |

Source: Atkinson & Hilgard et al (2003) Introduction to Psychology 14<sup>th</sup> edition.  
Wadsworth Asia Pvt Ltd.

There are two basic types of experiments in social psychology laboratory and natural laboratory and natural experiments have their particular rules. The laboratory experiment is of particular interest in social psychological discussions.

Social psychologists use some variations. Two of the most common of these variations are the quasi-experiments and the true randomized experiments. These two methods differ with respect to realism of the setting in which data are collected, and the degree of control that the researcher has over that setting.

### **3.3.2.4 Quasi-experimental Method**

Quasi-experiment is conducted in a natural, everyday life setting, over which the researcher has less than complete control. The lack of control over the setting arises from the very fact that it is an everyday life setting. Here the realism of the setting is relatively high, the control relatively low.

The true randomized experiment by contrast is one in which the researcher has complete control over key features of the setting. However, this degree of control often involves a loss of realism. It is sometimes possible to conduct a true randomized experiment in an everyday setting; this is called a field experiment.

**Table: Comparison of Experiments and Quasi Experiments**

| Attributes                 | Experiments | Quasi-experiments |
|----------------------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Representativeness of data | Low         | Low               |
| Realism of setting         | Low         | High              |
| Control over setting       | High        | Medium            |

As an example we take the problem, whether exposure to violent film and television material has an impact on the subsequent behaviour of the viewer. This issue can be studied using true randomized experiments or quasi-experiments.

An example of a true experiment on this issue is the study reported by Liebert and Baron (1972). Male and female children in two age groups were randomly allocated to one of two experimental conditions, one in which they viewed an excerpt from a violent television program and another in which they viewed an exciting athletics race. Later both groups of children were given the opportunity to hurt another child. Those who had seen the violent material were more likely to use this opportunity than those who had seen the non-violent material. As the children had been allocated to the violent and non-violent conditions randomly, the observed difference can be attributed with confidence to the difference in type of material seen, rather than any difference in the type of children who saw the material.

An example of quasi-experimental study of the same issue is the study reported by Black and Bevan (1992). They asked people to complete a short questionnaire measure of tendency to engage in aggressive behaviour under one of the four conditions: while waiting in line outside a cinema to see a violent movie; while waiting in line to see a non-violent movie; having just seen a violent movie and having just seen a non-violent movie. The researcher found that those waiting to see the violent film had higher aggression scores than those waiting to see the non-violent film; those who had just seen the violent film scored higher than those who had just seen a non-violent film.

While this pattern of finding is consistent with the conclusion that viewing a violent movie increases the tendency to aggress, the fact that participants were not allocated at random to the different conditions of the study means that other explanations cannot be ruled out.

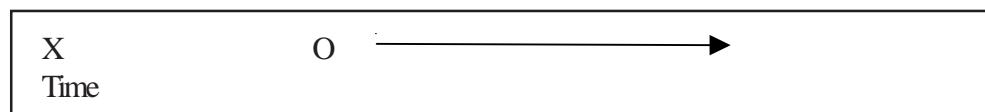
The strength of the experiment is its capability to draw causal inferences concerning the observed relationship between independent and dependent variables. The artificial setting is its major drawback. Major strength of the quasi-experiment is that it can be conducted under relatively natural conditions. But quasi experiment is inferior to true experiment in drawing causal conclusions.

Often the only way in which to conduct an experimental study of a social phenomenon is via a quasi-experiment. Ethical and practical considerations frequently make it impossible to allocate people randomly to different experimental conditions. For instance, to study the effects of bereavement, research participants

cannot be allocated to bereaved and non-bereaved condition. The same problem applies in many other fields of research, viz. social interventions, such as new teaching methods in schools, new ways of treating those who are suffering from physical or psychological disorders, new public information campaigns and new management techniques; people are not randomly assigned to participate or not to participate in these programs.

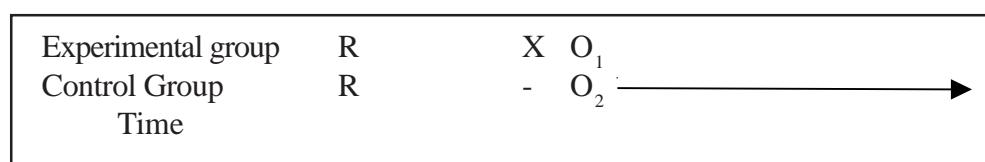
### 3.3.2.5 Experimental Designs

In an experiment, it is important that (1) the experimenter keep all theoretically irrelevant features of the experimental setting constant, manipulating just the key independent variable; and (2) that participants are allocated randomly to the different conditions of an experiment. Experimental designs are used so that the above goals are fulfilled. The first called one shot case study. Followings cook and Campbell (1979) we shall use symbol 'X' to stand for a manipulations (of the independent variable) and the symbol 'O' to stand for observations (i.e., the dependent variable). In these terms the one shot design looks like this:



For example, an educational researcher wanted to know the effect of a new teaching method on learning. The researcher takes a class of students, introduces the new method (X), and measures the student's comprehension of the taught material (O). There is nothing with which X is compared. One shot case study is a research design in which observations are made on a group after some event has occurred or some manipulation has been introduced. There is nothing with which these observations may be compared. So one has no way of knowing whether the event or manipulation had an effect.

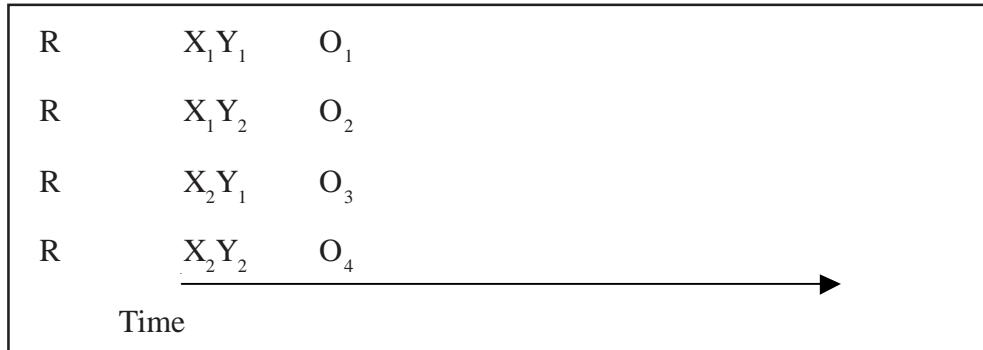
A true experimental design is known as Post test only control group design. In this type of design participants are allocated randomly to one of the two groups. One group is exposed to the independent variable (experimental group) and the other is not (control group). Both groups are assessed on the independent variable and the comparison of the two groups on this measure indicates whether or not the independent variable had an effect. Let R stand for random assignment of participants to conditions, and X and O stand for manipulation and observation. The design looks like this.



In the previous example, the researcher might compare one group of students who have been exposed to new teaching method with respect to their comprehension of the taught material. In this design participants are randomly allocated to the two conditions which ruled out the possibility that differences between  $O_1$  and  $O_2$  are due to the differences between the two groups of participants. If  $O_1$  and  $O_2$  differ markedly, it is reasonable to infer that this difference is caused by X.

There are many types of experimental designs used in social psychology, more sophisticated and complex than the above. Each design represents a more complete attempt to rule out the possibility that observed difference between conditions result from something other than the manipulation of independent variable

A common design in social psychological experiment is the factorial experiment, in which two or more independent variables are manipulated within the same study. The simplest case can be represented diagrammatically as follows, where R stands for random assignment of participants to conditions, X stands for a variable with two levels ( $X_1$  and  $X_2$ ) and Y stands for another variable with two levels ( $Y_1$  and  $Y_2$ ).



This design contains all possible combinations of the independent variables. In the design shown above, each independent variable has two levels, resulting in four conditions ( $2 \times 2$ ), which can be added further ( $3 \times 3$ ,  $2 \times 2 \times 2$ ) etc. The main benefit of a factorial design is that it allows the researcher to examine the separate and combined effects of two or more independent variables. The separate effects of each of the independent variable are known as main effects. Interaction effect is a term used when combined effects of two (or more) independent variables in a factorial experiment yield a pattern that differs from the sum of the main effects.

### **3.3.3 Threats to the Validity in Experimental Research**

Validity refers to the extent to which a method of measurement measures what it is supposed to measure. Experimental research attempts to maximise each of three types of validity (1) Internal validity (2) Construct validity (3) External Validity. The validity of an experiment may be threatened due to the following reasons:

- i) Confounding: The inference of causality is affected by confounded variables. In experimental work, it is the failure to separate two variables with the result that their effects cannot be independently ascertained. If in an experiment on memory and age all the older participants are female and all the younger are male, then sex and age are ‘confounded’ and the memory data cannot be properly interpreted.
- ii) Social desirability is a term used to describe the fact that participants are usually keen to be seen in a positive light and may therefore be reluctant to provide honest reports of fears, anxieties, feelings of hostility or prejudice or any other quality which they think would be regarded negatively.
- iii) Demand characteristics are ones in the experimental setting which convey the participant the nature of the experimenter’s hypothesis. Individuals who know that they are being studied will often be curious about what the experimenter is looking at and what types of responses are expected. Participants may then attempt to provide the expected responses in order to please the experimenter. When the behavior is enacted with the intention of fulfilling the experimenter’s hypothesis, it is said to be a response to the demand characteristics of the experiment.

- iii) Experimenter expectancy effect – refers to the experimenter's own hypothesis or expectation about the outcome of the research. It increases the likelihood that the participants will behave in such a way as to confirm the hypothesis.

There are certain ways to minimise these effects. Some of these are:

- i) *Post experimental enquiry*: A technique advocated by Orne (1962, 1969) for detecting the operation of demand characteristics. The participant is carefully interviewed after participation in an experiment. The purpose is to elicit from the participants what he or she believed to be the aim of the experiment; and the extent to which this belief affected his behaviour in the experiment.
- ii) *Unobtrusive measures (also called non-reactive measure)*: Measures that the participant is not aware of; and which therefore cannot influence his or her behaviour. Social desirability effects can be reduced by these measures. The point is that the participants do not know what it is that is being measured and they will be unable to modify their behaviour.
- iii) *Cover story*: a cover story is a false but supposedly plausible explanation of the purpose of an experiment. The intention is to limit the operation of demand characteristics. However, an unconvincing story can create more problems than it solves, raising doubts in the mind of the participant that otherwise may not have arisen.
- iv) *Another strategy* to reduce experimenter expectancy effect is to keep the experimenter blind to the hypothesis under test or at least blind to the condition to which a given participant has been allocated.

Other possibilities to reduce experimenter expectancy effect include minimising the interaction between experimenter and participants and automating the experiment as far as possible. The goal is to reduce the opportunity for the experimenter to communicate his or her expectancies.

#### Self Assessment Questions

- 1) Define experimental method.

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- 2) Define each of the terminologies used in experimental method.

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- 3) What is Quasi-experimental method? Discuss its characteristics.

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- 4) Compare experimental with quasi-experimental method

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- 5) Discuss experimental designs with illustrations.

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- 6) List out the threats to the validity of experimental research.

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### **3.4 ETHNOGRAPHY**

The word ethnography literally means writing about peoples. *Ethnos* in Greek means folk or people and *graphia* stands for writing. ‘Ethnography literally means ‘a portrait of a people.’ Ethnography is a written description of a particular culture: the customs, beliefs, and behaviour, based on information collected through fieldwork” (Marvin Harris and Orna Johnson, 2000).

“Ethnography is the art and science of describing a group or culture. The description may be of a small tribal group in an exotic land or a classroom in middle-class suburbia” (David M. Fetterman, 1998).

Ethnography is a qualitative research method. It has its roots in anthropology and sociology and in recent years has become a model for research in social psychology. Ethnography is a basic form of social research involving making observations, gaining data from informants, constructing hypotheses and acting upon them. The ethnographer participates actively in the research environment but does not structure it. Its approach is discovery based, the aim being to depict the activities and perspectives of actors.

this, the ethnographer participates in people's daily lives for a period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions, studying documents, in other words collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues with which the research is concerned" (Banister et al 1994: 34). Ethnography is a multimethod form of research. Participant observation forms the base method. Interviewing and action research are later stages.

Its success as a method depends on its ability to make a reader understand 'what goes in a society or a social circumstance as well the participants.' Psychologically ethnography is very interesting in itself, in that it bears a close resemblance to the routine ways in which people make sense of their world in everyday life. But its formalised multimethod form differentiates it from everyday sense making. The multimethod approach reduces the risks that can stem from reliance on a single kind of data, allowing the researcher to compare data collected by different methods.

Present-day practitioners conduct ethnographies in organisations and communities of all kinds. Ethnographers study schooling, public health, rural and urban development, consumers and consumer goods, any human arena. While particularly suited to exploratory research, ethnography draws on a wide range of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, moving from "learning" to "testing" while research problems, perspectives and theories emerge and shift.

### 3.4.1 Characteristics of Ethnography

#### Ethnography is characterised by

- 1 Gathering data from the range of sources, e.g. interviews, observations, conversations and documents.
- 1 Studying behaviour in everyday contexts rather than experimental conditions.
- 1 Using an unstructured approach to data gathering in the early stages, so that key issues can emerge gradually through analysis.
- 1 Comprising an in-depth study of one or two situations.

### 3.4.2 Steps in Ethnographic Method

#### Steps:

- 1) Ethnographer starts with selection of a culture, review of the literature pertaining to the culture and identification of variables.
- 2) The ethnographer then goes about gaining entrance, which in turn sets the stage for *cultural immersion* of the ethnographer in the culture. It is not unusual for ethnographers to live in the culture for months or even years.
- 3) The middle stages of the ethnographic method involve gaining informants, using them to gain yet more informants in a chaining process, and gathering data in the form of observational transcripts and interview recordings.
- 4) Data analysis and theory development come at the end, though theories may emerge from cultural immersion and theory-articulation by members of the culture.

However, the ethnographic researcher strives to avoid theoretical preconceptions and instead to induce theory from the perspectives of the members of the culture and from observation.

The researcher may seek validation of induced theories by going back to members of the culture for their reaction.

Ethnographic methodologies vary and some ethnographers advocate use of structured observation schedules by which one may code observed behaviours or cultural artefacts for purposes of later statistical analysis.

### 3.4.3 Other Methods of Ethnography

**Macro-ethnography** is the study of broadly-defined cultural groupings, such as “the Indians”.

**Micro-ethnography** is the study of narrowly-defined cultural groupings, such as “young working class women” or “members of Congress.”

**Emic perspective** is the ethnographic research approach to the way the members of the given culture perceive their world. The emic perspective is usually the main focus of ethnography.

**Etic perspective** is the ethnographic research approach to the way non-members (outsiders) perceive and interpret behaviours and phenomena associated with a given culture.

**Situational reduction** refers to the view of ethnographers that social structures and social dynamics emerge from and may be reduced analytically to the accumulated effects of micro situational interactions (Collins, 1988). Put another way, the cosmos is best understood in microcosm.

**Symbols**, always a focus of ethnographic research, are any material artefact of a culture, such as art, clothing, or even technology. The ethnographer strives to understand the cultural connotations associated with symbols. Technology, for instance, may be interpreted in terms of how it relates to an implied plan to bring about a different desired state for the culture.

**Cultural patterning** is the observation of cultural patterns forming relationships involving two or more symbols. Ethnographic research is *holistic*, believing that symbols cannot be understood in isolation but instead are elements of a whole. One method of patterning is *conceptual mapping*, using the terms of members of the culture themselves to relate symbols across varied forms of behaviour and in varied contexts. Another method is to focus on *learning processes*, in order to understand how a culture transmits what it perceives to be important across generations. A third method is to focus on *sanctioning processes*, in order to understand which cultural elements are formally (ex., legally) prescribed or proscribed and which are informally prescribed or proscribed, and of these which are enforced through sanction and which are unenforced.

**Tacit knowledge** is deeply-embedded cultural beliefs which are assumed in a culture’s way of perceiving the world, so much so that such knowledge is rarely or never discussed explicitly by members of the culture, but rather must be inferred by the ethnographer.

Ethnographic researchers recognise that they are part of the social world they study and that they cannot avoid having an effect on the social phenomena being studied, “...rather than engaging in futile attempts to eliminate the effects of the researcher, we should set about understanding them” (Hammersley and Atkinson).

### Meta analysis

As a number of studies on a particular topics increase, researchers are confronted with a new problem: how to synthesize research findings to arrive at general conclusions. Consider work on sex differences in helping behavior. Eagly and Crowley (1986) identified no fewer than 172 separate studies that investigated male and female differences in helping behaviour. How are researchers to handle this ever increasing quantity of empirical research?

In recent years statistical techniques called meta-analysis have been developed to help researchers review and synthesize empirical findings systematically. The first step is for the researcher to find as many studies as possible on the same topic. The meta-analysis uses statistical methods to pool information from all available studies. The goal is to arrive at an overall estimate of the size of the finding. In Meta analysis, statistics are also used to test for the consistency (homogeneity) of findings across studies. When results from different studies are found to be highly consistent, researches can have much confidence in findings. When results of studies differ, meta analysis techniques direct researchers to look for other important factors.

Meta analysis is an important tool for understanding the social psychological research, and so for understanding social behavior and social cognition. As noted by Myers (1991) meta-analysis reviews can help counteract our tendency to be unduly influenced by the results of one or a few studies that are especially interesting or ingenious, since such reviews combine the findings of many studies by statistical formula.

#### 3.4.4 Evaluation

In the preceding sections we discussed various methods and importance of the precise process of investigations. But sometimes strict adherence to scientific procedures creates problem for social psychology.

In social psychology we study the psychological characteristics of large groups and mass processes where other than pure scientific methods are required. In these methods the problem is raised by whether the information is subjective or objective.

The source of information is always man. There are certain ways by which the reliability of the information is ensured to overcome shortcomings of our methods. The reliability of information is reached through the verification the reliability of the data collecting instruments. Three characteristics of the reliability of information are ensured in every instance: validity, stability and precision.

The other problem is related to the processing of the material. “To what degree is the researcher allowed to include considerations of both logic and content theory in the interpretation of data?” (Andreyeva 1990: 57).

Thus the main task for a science to be human is to find the means through which

social context can be grasped in every concrete study. It is important to see the problem, understand that value judgments inescapably exist in investigations carried out within the framework of sciences like social psychology, and that the researcher should not avoid the problem but should consciously determine his social position.

Before the beginning of an investigation, before the choice of method is made, the basic outline of the research must be precisely defined, and the goal of the research and its premises must be thoroughly thought out.

### **Self Assessment Questions**

- 1) Define and discuss ethnography as a method of social psychology research.

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- 2) What are the characteristic features of ethnographic method?

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- 3) Elucidate the steps in ethnographic method in social psychology research.

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- 4) Discuss the various other methods in ethnography.

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- 5) What is evaluation? Why is it important?

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- 6) What are the methods used in evaluation of a social psychology research?

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### **3.5 LET US SUM UP**

Procedures for gathering information in any discipline are known as methods. Validity of statements about human behaviour and events is verified by relying on authorities and common sense. But these methods can give us explanations often rejected on logical grounds. In social psychology various methods are used dictated by our problem of investigation. Methods of data collection are observations, the study of documents, questionnaire, interviews, testing and experiment etc. Methods of analysis can be statistical (correlation, Factor analysis) or logical and theoretical (viz. constructs of typology, various means of explanations). Observational method is mostly used for data collection, correlational method is an analytic method whereby the relationship between two or more variables is assessed. Experimental method is the preferred method to study cause and effect relations between the independent variable and dependent variable, ethnography is method that uses multiple methods—the purpose is to write about the behaviour of people as and when it occurs and no attempts to be objective are made, the observers point of view is important in this method, and currently meta analysis is used to synthesize the findings of many researches on a topic.

Before researching on social psychological problems the basic goal and outline should be precisely worked out. The choice of method depends on nature of our problem. On the whole, researchers have to keep in mind that social reality and context should not be left out of the whole exercise. The essence of the research should not be lost for the sake of scientific rigor.

### **3.6 UNIT END QUESTIONS**

- 1) What do you mean by an empirical science? Is social psychology an empirical science? Give two reasons.
- 2) What do you understand by observation method? Give its advantages and disadvantages.
- 3) Write an essay on correlational method (500 words).
- 4) What is an experiment? Differentiate between laboratory experiment and quasi experiment.
- 5) Differentiate between correlational and experimental method.
- 6) What is meta-analysis? What is the importance of meta-analysis in social psychological research?
- 7) What do you mean by main effect and interactional effect in experimental method terminology?

- 8) Differentiate between control group and experimental group.
  - 9) What do you mean by ethnographic research? What is the importance of ethnographic research for social psychology?
  - 10) Write the ways in which threats to the validity of an experiment could be worked out.
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## **3.7 GLOSSARY**

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|                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Method</b>                      | : procedures for gathering information in any discipline are known as methods.                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Methodology</b>                 | : refers to all aspects of the implementation of methods.                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Induction</b>                   | : process of reasoning in which general principle are inferred from specific cases.                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Observation</b>                 | : to observe the phenomena under study as it occurs naturally.                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Participant observation</b>     | : observation in which a researcher participates in the ongoing activities of the people being observed.                                                                                                      |
| <b>Non-participant observation</b> | : observer records people's behaviour but does not participate in their activities.                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Reactivity</b>                  | : Observers' tendency to evoke reactive behaviour on the part of those being observed.                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Correlation</b>                 | : a relationship between two (or more) variables such that systematic increase or decrease in the magnitude of one variable is accompanied by systematic increase or decrease in the magnitude of the others. |
| <b>Experiment</b>                  | : A well controlled test of hypothesis about cause and effect.                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Ethnography</b>                 | : a written description of a particular culture (the customs, beliefs and behaviour) based on information collected through fieldwork.                                                                        |
| <b>Meta-Analysis</b>               | : A method to review and synthesize empirical findings systematically.                                                                                                                                        |

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## **3.8 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES**

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