

SOCIOLOGY II INDUSTRIAL & ECONOMIC SOCIOLOGY II

2024: FIRST TERM

INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL RESEARCH



Ms Janet Chisaka
(j.chisaka@ru.ac.za)

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the introductory module on social research. Social research is conducted by social scientists and other social investigators to reveal, describe, explain, critique and offer suggestions for improving the social world. At the individual level, we also try to understand the social world. For example, how are individual South Africans coping with and making sense of the disruptive load shedding? Scientific studies are designed to avoid the pitfalls of ordinary human inquiry. Therefore, this module aims to introduce you to the scientific method of social research, with a focus on the following.

- The nature of social research
- Social theory and research
- The research process
- Qualitative and quantitative research designs
- Research concepts, methods, procedures and techniques
- Ethics and politics in social research

The module will run from 12 February to 27 March. Beyond the class and examination mark, the module will provide you with the basic skills to become both a producer and an informed consumer of research in the social sciences and in the media, especially social media. You will learn how research is designed, and how to generate and frame a research question, test concepts, evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of various research strategies, and analyse data. You will also learn to appreciate the challenges that social scientists frequently encounter when investigating social phenomena, and the influence of ethical principles on scientific inquiry.

MODULE STRUCTURE

What we *do* in social research is guided by *thinking about* our personal position and our understanding of our place in the universe (cosmology) and axiology (values), of ontology (ways of being) and epistemology (ways of knowing). Similarly, using the logic of social research, our choices of how we study society rest on and are shaped by a particular way in which social phenomena are viewed.

The first three weeks of the module will focus on the nature and process of social research, social research strategies and research designs. The last three weeks will involve a practical application of the theoretical discussions covered in the first three weeks, and the module concludes with a discussion of ethics and politics in social research. The last week will be revision, which will include question and answer sessions.

PRESCRIBED TEXTBOOK

Bryman, A., Clark, T., Foster, L. & Sloan, L. (2022). *Bryman's social research methods* (sixth international edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

You are encouraged to read beyond the prescribed book (see the list of optional readings below). All illustrations in the module will be drawn from research conducted in sub-Saharan African, particularly South African studies. You are also encouraged to apply research concepts and theory when reading research findings published in the media, as well as personal reflections on social reality.

WEEK 1: THE NATURE AND PROCESS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

Lecture 1: What is social research? (pp. 1-5)

Social research is a systematic and organised method to investigate a specific problem that needs a solution. It always takes place in specific social, political, and economic contexts. It is also heavily informed and influenced by the researchers' theoretical positions, and a range of factors that will be explored in this lecture and in the module.

Lectures 2-4: The elements of social research (pp. 5-11)

The lectures will focus on the main elements of social research – i.e. literature review, concepts and theories, research questions, sampling, data collection, data analysis, and writing up. We will also briefly discuss the 'messiness' of social research – i.e., "...the accounts of the findings and how they were arrived at tend to follow an implicit template that emphasizes some aspects of the research process but not others" (Bryman *et al.*, 2022: 11).

WEEK 2: SOCIAL RESEARCH STRATEGIES: QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Lecture 5: Theory and research (pp. 13-19)

What is the importance of theory in research? How can theory guide research? How can data collection and data analysis be used to test theory? What is the relationship between theory and research? These questions will be answered in this lecture, and we will also discuss how theory can *follow upon* (deductive approach) or *arise from* (inductive approach) the collection of data.

Lectures 6-7: Epistemological and ontological considerations (pp. 19-27)

Epistemology focuses on notions of what can be known and how knowledge can be acquired, and whether the social sciences should follow the same principles and procedures as the natural sciences. Ontology is concerned with the nature of things that exist. More narrowly, the ontology of a theory are the kinds of 'stuff' (objects, properties, relations, etc.) that, according to the theory, exist in reality. In simple terms, ontology is associated with what we consider as reality.

Lecture 8: Research strategy - quantitative and qualitative research (pp. 27-28; 99-101; 279-280)

This is an overview of the two approaches to research: namely, quantitative and qualitative research. A detailed account on how to do quantitative and qualitative research will be covered in weeks 4-6.

WEEK 3: RESEARCH DESIGNS

Lectures 9-11: Research designs (pp. 44-58)

A research design provides a framework for the collection and analysis of data. A choice of research design reflects decisions about a range of dimensions of the research process such as understanding individual action and the meaning of that activity in its specific social context.

Lecture 12: A summary of the key concepts and theory covered in the first three weeks

WEEK 4: QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Lectures 13-16: Quantitative research methods (pp. 99-117; 120-141; 143-160)

As discussed in week 2, quantitative research often takes a *deductive* view of the relationship between theory and research, which means that theory comes first, driving the research, rather

than emerging from it. The focus will be on the process of quantitative research – e.g. how to formulate a research question, sampling and structured interviewing.

WEEK 5: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Lectures 17-20 Qualitative research methods (pp. 279-303; 305-316; 347-366)

As discussed in week 2, qualitative research often takes an *inductive* view of the relationship between theory and research, which means theory emerges from research. The focus will be data collection methods in qualitative research, sampling and semi-structured interviewing.

WEEK 6: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH (CONTINUED)

Lectures 21: Qualitative research methods (pp. 372-391; 436-459)

We will continue to discuss qualitative research methods, namely focus groups and data analysis.

Lecture 22: Mixed methods research (pp. 520-537)

This lecture discusses the value and popularity of *mixed methods* research.

WEEK 6: ETHICS AND POLITICS IN SOCIAL RESEARCH

Lectures 23-24: Ethical principles, ethics and the issue of quality, the difficulties of ethical decision making, and politics in social research (pp. 472-491)

All research raises ethical issues. When we talk about ‘ethics’ in social research, we are addressing those issues that concern the behaviour of social researchers and the consequences of their research for the people they study. As such, ethical issues have the potential to impact on *every* stage of the research process.

WEEK 7: REVISION

Lectures 25-28:

This week’s lectures will be a revision of the topics covered in the module.

Optional Readings

The prescribed and optional readings are available on Short Loan and 48-Hour Loan in the library. Key readings will be placed on RUconnected. You encouraged to search for and read electronic journal articles on studies in sub-Saharan Africa, especially South African studies (see the list of useful journals below).

Babbie, E. R. & Mouton, J. (2001). *The practice of social research*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

Babbie, E. R. (2016). *The practice of social research* (fourteenth edition). Belmont, CA: Cengage Learning. [ebook available on OPAC]

Babbie, E. R. (2017). *The basics of social research* (seventh edition). Boston: Cengage Learning.

Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods* (fourth edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Creswell, J.W. (2009). *Research design: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods approaches* (third edition). London: Sage Publications.

Neuman, W.L. (2006). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Boston, Mass.: Allyn and Bacon.

Neuman, W.L. (2014). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Boston, Mass.: Allyn and Bacon.

Punch, K. (2005). *Introduction to social research: Quantitative and qualitative approaches*. London: Sage.

Ritchie, J. & Lewis, J. (2003). *Qualitative research practice. A guide for social science students and researchers*. London: SAGE Publications.

Terre Blanche, M. & Durrheim, K. (2006). *Research in practice: Applied methods for the social sciences*. Cape Town: UCT Press.

Sarantakos, S. (2012). *Social research*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Useful Journals on South African Studies

Acta Academica. Available at: <https://0-journals.co.za.wam.seals.ac.za/journal/academ>

South African Review of Sociology. Available at: <https://0-www.tandfonline.com.wam.seals.ac.za/loi/rssr20>

ASSESSMENT

There will be two forms of assessment for this course – i.e., two tests and an examination in June. The format for the tests and examination will be one-word and short (three to four sentences) answers. The module mark is composed as follows:

Tests = 40%

June examination = 60%

The tests will be written in Bio-Science Major on:

1 March from 14h15 to 15h45

22 March from 14h15 to 15h45

Two *compulsory* workshops will be conducted on 23 February and 15 March. It is in your best interest to prepare and participate meaningfully in the workshops in preparation for the tests and examination. The workshops will be facilitated by teaching assistants and groups will comprise of 24-26 students. The list of groups will be posted on RUconnected.

Workshop 1: 23 February

The focus is on the nature and process of social research, and social research strategies (covered in weeks 1 & 2). The workshop topic is: *'Food safety and labelling.'*

In pairs or trios, answer the following questions regarding this proposed research topic:

- What concepts can you use to make sense of food safety?
- What are the main factors that influence the proposed research on food safety?
- What is the difference between the discussion of this topic in this workshop and everyday (especially social media) accounts on food safety?
- What theory can you use to research this topic (provide reasons for your choice)?

Each pair will share their responses with the rest of the group, and this will be chaired by a workshop facilitator.

Workshop 2: 15 March

The focus is on quantitative and qualitative research methods covered in weeks 4 & 5. The workshop topic is: *'Food safety and labelling.'* In pairs or trios, answer the following questions regarding this proposed research topic:

- Which research method (qualitative or quantitative) would you use in a study on food safety (provide reasons for choice)?
- What sampling method would you use (provide reasons for your choice)?
- What data collection method will you use (provide reasons for your choice)?
- Formulate 10 survey research questions and 10 semi-structured (open-ended) questions.

Please consult the Sociology Handbook for an outline of the University's policy on plagiarism, guidelines on the formatting and writing of assignments, the departmental rules regarding citations and referencing, and the criteria for assessing written work. A copy of the Assignment Cover Sheet, which must accompany all assignments submitted to the Department, is also available in Handbook.

MODULE EVALUATION

As a department, we are committed to reflecting on our teaching practices and module content to strengthen our courses. Towards the end of the term, you will be asked to participate in a module evaluation process. Please take this seriously and evaluate the module honestly and comprehensively. Your input will be highly appreciated and make a real contribution to enhancing teaching and learning in the department.

CONSULTATION TIMES

Mondays to Thursdays: 14h15 to 16h00

Please email me for an appointment (j.chisaka@ru.ac.za).