

Research: a way of thinking Research is not only a set of skills, but also a way of thinking. Within this framework of thinking, you usually question what you observe, make an attempt to further explore, understand and explain your observations, and draw conclusions and inferences to enhance your practice skills and their knowledge base. It is looking at your practice or work situation inquisitively, critically and analytically to gain an in-depth knowledge of its rationale, relevance, * unstructured inquiries " Is pil inslee NEED HELP WITH YOUR ASSIGNMENT? *... o effectiveness and efficiency. You develop an attitude that encourages you to challenge different aspects of your work situation, to question their purpose, relevance and validity, to find their strengths and weaknesses, and to investigate the possibilities and ways for further improvements and refinements. Research develops this thinking, inquisitive perspective in you. Thinking in this research mode, as a practitioner, you develop the ability to ask yourself questions such as: What am I doing? Why am I doing this? How is it affecting my clients or consumers? How can I improve my work? Such questions naturally come to your mind as a practitioner, and as a researcher you make attempts to find their answers. It is to find answers to such questions that you need to have research skills. Research: One of the ways of finding answers to your professional and practice questions. It is characterised by the use of tested procedures and methods and an unbiased and objective attitude in the process of exploration. Research develops in you a way of thinking that is logical and rational and that encourages you to critically examine every aspect of your day-to-day situation. It helps you to understand and formulate guiding principles that govern a particular procedure in your practice, and develop and test new ways that contribute to the advancement of your practice and profession. This way of thinking develops in you a very different perspective to your work. Research develops this analytical way of thinking in you, and the knowledge of research methodology provides you with the techniques to find answers to your research questions. This research orientation becomes a cycle of your practice which, in turn, encourages you to further observe, question, explore, test and understand various aspects of your practice. Research: an integral part of your professional practice Research is an integral part of good professional practice in many professions and has been responsible for greatly influencing the practice procedures and outcomes in these professions. Among many professions such as medicine, public health, psychology and education, research and practice are well integrated, and practice relies very heavily upon what is discovered through research. As a matter of fact, research and practice are two sides of the same coin that should and cannot be separated. It would be appropriate to say that the greater the integration between research and practice in a profession, the greater the advancement in its theoretical and practice knowledge base. As mentioned, research is a habit of questioning what you do, and a systematic way of examining your clinical observations to explain and find answers for what you observe in your practice, with a view to instituting appropriate changes for a more effective professional service. Let us take some disciplines as examples. Suppose you are working in the field of health. You may be a front-line service provider, supervisor or health administrator/planner. You may be in a hospital or working as an outreach community health worker. You may be a nurse, doctor, occupational therapist, physiotherapist, social worker or other paramedic. In any of these positions, you may ask yourself or be asked some of the following questions: • How many patients do I see every day? • What are some of the most common

conditions prevalent among my patients? ● What are the causes of these conditions? ● Why do some people have a particular condition whereas others do not? ● What is the average cost of a service to a patient? ● What is the ideal population–worker ratio for this programme? ● What are the health needs of the community? ● What are the benefits of this programme to the community? ● How do I demonstrate the effectiveness of my service? ● Why do some people use the service while others do not? ● What do people think about the service? ● How satisfied are patients with the service? ● How effective is the service? ● How can the service be improved? You can add many other questions to this list. At times it may be possible to ignore these questions because of the level at which you work; at other times you may make an effort to find answers on your own initiative, or sometimes you may be required to obtain answers for effective administration and planning. Let us take another discipline: business studies. Assume you work in the area of marketing. Again, you can work at different levels: as a salesperson, sales manager or sales promotion executive. The list of questions that may occur to you is endless. The types of questions and the need to find answers to them will vary with the level at which you work in the organisation. You may just want to find out the monthly fluctuation in the sales of a particular product, or you may be asked to develop a research and development strategic plan to compete for a greater share of the market for your company's products. You may ask yourself or be asked, for example: ● What is the best strategy to promote the sale of a particular product? ● How many salespersons do I need? ● What is the effect of a particular advertising campaign on the sale of this product? ● How satisfied are consumers with this product? ● How much are consumers prepared to spend on this product? ● What do consumers like or dislike about this product? ● What type of packaging do consumers prefer for this product? ● What training do the salespersons need to promote the sale of this product? ● What are the attributes of a good salesperson? Again, suppose you are a teacher working in a school. In your day-to-day teaching you are likely to encounter many complex questions and issues, the answers to which could directly or indirectly improve your effectiveness as a teacher. Some of these questions could be: ● What do students think about my teaching? ● What do I need to do to become a better teacher? ● Why are some students good at their studies while others are not? ● What effect does the home environment have on the academic achievement of a child? ● What, in students' opinion, are the attributes of a good teacher? ● Do I have the attributes that make a good teacher? ● What is the attitude of students towards homework? ● What determines students' motivation in their studies? ● Is there a relationship between academic achievement and occupational aspirations? You can go on adding to this list. Answers to these questions will help you to become a better teacher and develop policies and programmes that will improve the system. In an attempt to find valid answers to these questions you need to have research skills. To take a different example, let us assume that you work as a psychologist, counsellor or social worker. In the course of your work you may ask yourself (or someone else may ask you) the following questions: ● What are my clients' most common presenting problems? ● What are their most common underlying problems? ● What are the reasons for their problems? ● What is the socioeconomic background of my clients? ● Why am I successful in certain cases and not in others? ● What intervention strategies are more effective for the problems of my clients? ● What resources are available in the community to help a client with a particular need? ● What intervention strategies are appropriate for this

problem? ● How satisfied are my clients with my services? ● How can I improve the quality of my services? As a supervisor, administrator or manager of an agency, again different questions relating to the effectiveness and efficiency of a service may come to your mind. For example: ● How many people are coming to my agency? ● What are the socioeconomic–demographic characteristics of my clients? ● How many cases can a worker effectively handle in a day? ● Why do some people use the service while others do not? ● How effective is the service? ● What are the most common needs of clients who come to this agency? ● What are the strengths and weaknesses of the service? ● How satisfied are the clients with the service? ● How can I improve this service for my clients? Still, at another level of practice, as a professional who feels a responsibility to contribute to the development and enhancement of your profession, you might be interested in finding answers to theoretical questions, such as: ● What is the most effective intervention for a particular problem? ● What causes X, or what are the effects of Y? ● What is the relationship between two phenomena such as unemployment and street crime; stressful living and heart attack; breakdown in marital relationships and personal communication; and immigration and family roles? ● How do I measure the self–esteem of my clients? ● How do I ascertain the validity of my questionnaire? ● What is the pattern of programme adoption in the community? ● What is the best way of finding out community attitudes towards an issue? ● What is the best way to find out the effectiveness of a particular treatment? ● How can I select an unbiased sample? ● What is the best way to find out about the level of marriage satisfaction among my clients? Let us now consider some questions from the other side of the desk; that is, from the perspectives of consumers of your service. Recent decades have witnessed a tremendous shift in attitudes in the way consumers expect and accept services. It has changed from an obligatory perspective to the right to have a service. The focus is now not only on the service but also on its quality. Therefore in this age of consumerism, you cannot afford to ignore the consumers of a service. Consumers have the right to ask questions about the quality and effectiveness of the service they are receiving and you, as the service provider, have an obligation to answer their questions. Some of the questions that a consumer may ask are: ● How effective is the service that I am receiving? ● Am I getting value for money? ● How well trained are the service providers? Most professions that are in the human service industry would lend themselves to the questions raised above and you as a service provider should be well prepared to answer them. Irrespective of your field of practice and the level at which you work, in your day–to–day practice, you will encounter many of these questions and to improve your practice you must find their answers. Research is one of the ways to help you do so objectively. Research: a way to gather evidence for your practice In recent decades evidence–based practice (EBP) has gained recognition as a requirement for a good professional practice. In professions such as medicine it has become a service delivery norm, a requirement and an indicator of practice accountability. Though its origin is credited to medical practice, EBP has become an important part of many other professions such as nursing, allied health services, mental health, community health, social work, psychology and teaching. It is now being promoted as an acceptable and scientific method for policy formulation and practice assessment. Evidence–based practice: A service delivery system that is based upon research evidence as to its effectiveness; a service provider's clinical judgement as to its suitability and appropriateness for a client; and a client's preference as to its

acceptance. evidence-based practice Evidence-based practice is the delivery of services based upon research evidence about their effectiveness; the service provider's clinical judgement as to the suitability and appropriateness of the service for a client; and the client's own preference as to the acceptance of the service. The concept of EBP encourages professionals and other decision-makers to use evidence regarding the effectiveness of an intervention in conjunction with the characteristics and circumstances of a client and their own professional judgement to determine the appropriateness of an intervention when providing a service to a client. In this age of accountability, you as a professional must be accountable to your clients as well as your profession. It is as a part of this accountability that you need to demonstrate the effectiveness of the service(s) you provide. Checkpoint Evidence-based practice Research is one of the ways of collecting accurate, sound and reliable information about the effectiveness of your interventions, thereby providing you with evidence of its effectiveness. As service providers and professionals, we use techniques and procedures developed by research methodologists to consolidate, improve, develop, refine and advance clinical aspects of our practice to serve our clients better. Applications of research in practice development and policy formulation Very little research in the field is 'pure' in nature; that is, very few people do research in research methodology per se. The use of research skills is mostly 'applied'; that is, they are often used in the development of practice skills and procedures, and the formulation of practice policies. All professions use research methods in varying degrees in many areas. They use the methods and procedures developed by research methodologists in order to increase understanding of different aspects of practice in their own profession and to enhance their professional knowledge base. It is through the application of research methodology that they strengthen and advance their own professional knowledge and skills. Examine your own field. You will find that its professional practice follows procedures and practices tested and developed by others over a long period of time. It is in this testing process that you need research skills, the development of which falls in the category of pure research. As a matter of fact, the validity of your findings entirely depends upon the soundness of the research methods and procedures you adopt. Within any profession, where you directly or indirectly provide a service, such as health (nursing, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, community health, health promotion and public health), education, psychology or social work, the application of research can be viewed from four different perspectives: 1. the service provider; 2. the service administrator, manager and/or planner; 3. the service consumer; and 4. the professional. These perspectives are summarised in Figure 1.1. Though it is impossible to list all the issues in every discipline, this framework can be applied to most disciplines and situations in the humanities and the social sciences. You should be able to use this to identify, from the viewpoint of the above perspectives, the possible issues in your own academic field where research techniques can be used to find answers. Research: what does it mean? The word 'research' has multiple meanings and its precise definition varies from discipline to discipline and expert to expert. Across disciplines and experts, however, there seems to be agreement with respect to the functions it performs; that is, to find answers to your research questions. You can use any of the research methods/ approaches to achieve this objective. These methods range from the fairly informal, based upon clinical impressions, to the strictly scientific, adhering to the conventional expectations of scientific procedures. Research means using one of these methods

to find answers to your questions. However, when you say that you are undertaking a research study to find answers to a question, you are implying that the process being applied: 1. is being undertaken within a framework of a set of philosophies; 2. uses procedures, methods and techniques that have been tested for their validity and reliability; 3. is designed to be unbiased and objective. Your philosophical orientation may stem from one of the several paradigms and approaches in research – positivist, interpretive, phenomenology, action or participatory, feminist, qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods – and the academic discipline in which you have been trained. The concept of 'validity' can be applied to any aspect of the research process. It ensures that in a research study correct procedures have been applied to find answers to a question. 'Reliability' refers to the quality of a measurement procedure that provides repeatability and accuracy. 'Unbiased and objective' means that you have taken each step in an unbiased manner and drawn each conclusion to the best of your ability and without introducing your own vested interest. The author makes a distinction between bias and subjectivity. Subjectivity is an integral part of your way of thinking that is 'conditioned' by your educational background, academic discipline, philosophy, experience and skills. For example, a psychologist may look at a piece of information differently than an anthropologist or a historian. Bias, on the other hand, is a deliberate attempt to either conceal or highlight something because of your vested interest. Adherence to the three criteria mentioned above enables the process to be called 'research'. Therefore, when you say you are undertaking a research study to find the answer to a question, this implies that the method you are adopting fulfils these expectations (discussed later in the chapter). Bias: A deliberate attempt either to conceal or highlight something that you found in your research or to use deliberately a procedure or method that you know is not appropriate but will provide information that you are looking for because you have a vested interest in it. Subjectivity: This is an integral part of your way of thinking that is 'conditioned' by your educational background, discipline, philosophy, experience and skills. Bias is a deliberate attempt to change or highlight something which in reality is not there but you do it because of your vested interest. Subjectivity is not deliberate, it is inherent in the way you understand or interpret something.