**Chapter two**

**Research Methods in Community Psychology**

Goals and values of research in CP is basically different from research objectives in the dominant traditional psychology. For example, research is assumed to be objective, and hence, “value-free” in traditional psychology. However, Nelson and Prilleltensky (2005) stated that community research is value laden. The traditional psychology aims at achieving the goals of description, explanation, prediction, and control. Traditional psychologists are interested in the biomedical model, using animals in experiments, and quantitative techniques. In contrast, CP research aims at achieving the goals of empowerment, well-being, advocacy, and liberation through participatory research.

**Philosophical paradigms in community research**

**Paradigms** refers to world views, a set of beliefs, philosophies and assumptions about the world that guide action (Creswell, 2009; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). Philosophical paradigms are closely related to philosophies of science; ***ontology*** (nature of reality), ***epistemology*** (form and source of knowledge), ***ideology*** (system of belief) and ***methodology*** (how we know things).

1. **Positivism/Post positivism**

**Positivism** refers to traditional philosophy of research related to the *scientific method*. Positivists believe in the existence of absolute reality and they try to find this absolute truth through quantitative methods.

August Comte, Emile Durkheim, Isaac Newton, John Mill, and John Lock are proponents of positivism.

The following are some of the assumptions in positivism:

* ***Reductionism***: reducing ideas into small, discreet parts in order to understand them.
* ***Determinism***: belief in cause and effect relationship. Positivists aim at finding universal laws, principles, or theories that govern the universe (applicable in many circumstances). For example, Skinner’s laws of reinforcement.
* ***Objectivism***: dualistic attitude that states research (known) and researchers (knower) are distinct. Observers are neutral, value-free in research.

**Post positivism**: a movement that recognized that researcher cannot be totally objective, and reality can never be fully grasped. They claimed that there could be slight variations across cultures and individuals in finding and applying knowledge.

Post positivism is somewhat modest as compared to the positivist stance. The reality is “out there” and we can get closer to the reality and there could be slight variation among researchers in finding that reality. Both positivists and post-positivists rely on quantitative method. Moreover, positivists/post-positivists dualistic attitude, the researcher (knower) and the topic (known) are different. Therefore, the state of reality does not depend up on the researcher.

***Etic perspective***: independent (outside) perspective concerned with comparison between cultures and the use of methods that can be applied across communities.

1. **Post modernism**

Literally, postmodernism refers to “after modernism”. Postmodernism developed in opposition to the modernists (positivists) claim that the truth is “out there”. Postmodernists consider reality as socially constructed. Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and other similar philosophers are advocators of postmodern thought.

Jacques Derrida, developed ***deconstruction***, a system of analysis that assumes a text has no single meaning; reader’s understanding of the text is culturally conditioned. Similarly, Michel Foucault (1926-1984), French philosopher, from historical analysis, stated *that concepts* ***such as reason, madness, responsibility, punishment, and power were*** dependent upon time and place. He stated that knowledge and power are socially constructed in order to coerce and dominate the minorities.

**Social constructivism**

Social constructivism states that there are multiple realities constructed by the society through interaction. However, reality and knowledge are subjective experiences conditioned by culture, politics, and history. They believe that there is no ultimate reality.

In terms of research, community researchers, according to social constructivists, should try to understand and interpret peoples’ own subjective experiences and attitudes through qualitative research. Social constructivism is closely related to the position of holism, the research and the researcher are not distinct.

This philosophy follows ***emic perspective***: in-depth inside view, local study of an individual community or culture from its own perspective.

1. **Pragmatic Paradigm**

William James, Herbert Mead, and John Dewey are the major proponents of pragmatisms. Pragmatism is a paradigm states that research should be conducted in order to solve real life problems by using a mixed set of methods. For pragmatists, reality is what works at a moment in real life application.

Pragmatism is closely related to critical paradigm in which both of them focus on solving social problems.

1. **Critical Paradigm**

Critical paradigm is developed based on Marxist philosophy, and post-positivism, constructivism to bring about of social change, liberation, and social justice (Creswell, 2009; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). Critical paradigm states that researchers should play the role of advocators in addressing issues of oppression, inequality, marginalization, and alienated groups.

Community psychologists with the philosophy of critical paradigm work with the oppressed people (e.g. poor, women, unemployed, disabled, etc.) in order to empower and liberate them. Critical paradigm has transformative value (promoting self-determination, social justice, inclusion, and accountability to the oppressed). They use both qualitative and quantitative participatory methods specifically through dialogue and dialectical method.