


Chapter 8

Exploring African Research Methodology: The Sankofa Philosophy in Social Work Research

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ABSTRACT

The study used the descriptive design which capitalized on the strength of the participants to use their mother language during data collection. The study population was drawn from Wendumba community in Marange, Zimbabwe where most of the elderly members of the community are found. The elderly represented the custodians and embodiment of cultural values and knowledge which served as an essential source of study information. The study found that the Sankofa philosophy is significant in social work research as it provides African perspectives of how the past experiences can inform the present and the future intervention programmes. The lessons learnt in the past should not be ignored but should be integrated in social work research for the betterment of people's lives.

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INTRODUCTION

Each society has unique cultural concepts, values and norms that should be considered when carrying out social work research. Africa is not an exception as it has a diversity of cultural values and norms. It is a socio-centric society whereby the interests of the majority take precedence over individual interests (Chirongoma, Shumba & Dube, 2019). The past experiences serve as learning opportunities for improving the community members' social welfare (Ajagbe & Ewane, 2018). The previous mistakes are avoided as members thrive to build a better future. The needs of the community are addressed in the context of its culture. It is upon this consideration that the researcher seeks to explore the Sankofa philosophy of the Akan people of Ghana in social work research. Rapoport (1970), described Sankofa philosophy as aimed to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals of social sciences by collaboration within a mutually acceptable ethical framework. Orford (2004) regarded the use of Sankofa philosophy social work research as having stemmed from the desire to solve community challenges for the betterment of people's lives. Susman and Evered (2019), considered Sankofa philosophy as geared towards solving multi-problems on a large scale. The philosophy values the integration of the past and present ideas in social work research methodology.

Background

According to (Dolamo, 2013), Sankofa serves as a metaphor for how knowledge of the past can help chart the course for the future of social work research. The origin of the Sankofa philosophy is attributed to the Sankofa bird, which is highly revered by the Akan people of Ghana. Its peculiar behaviour of looking backwards whilst moving forwards has brought the idea of integrating the past and the present ideas in social work research (Mungai, 2015). The Sankofa philosophy is an embodiment of cultural values of social cohesion, trustworthiness, reciprocity, genuineness, generosity, tolerance, happiness, empathy and compassion. The philosophy allows the researchers to make a reflection of the past research endeavours to improve the present and future social research methodology. The philosophy provides an opportunity for the community members to exercise self-introspection by considering the past and the present experiences (Aju & Beddewela, 2020). The past experiences of the local members of the community are used as benchmarks of identifying and rectifying the previously missed points and ideas for the betterment of people's lives. The African driven Sankofa philosophy contributes to sustainable, meaningful and relevant social work research findings. In a socio-centric African society, the community members are bound together by shared past and present experiences, relationships and solidarity (Care International Zimbabwe, 2019). The present is understood in the context of the past experiences.

The study is premised upon the aim of exploring the value of Sankofa philosophy in social work research methodology in the African context. The Sankofa philosophy is an African oriented approach which seeks to address the community's concerns by integrating the past and present experiences (Sithole & Manyani, 2020). The members of the community are understood in the context of their culture, that should not be separated from their past values and norms.

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