Chapter –II

Research Methodology
Chapter II

Research Methodology

“Research is not a mechanical or merely automatic process, but is directed towards specifically human goals of understanding and gaining insight and explanation.”

-Mouton and Marais (1988)

Research Approaches

In social science research, there are diverse viewpoints of social reality, and social scientists take different standpoints while examining this social reality (Bryman 2008; McNeill and Chapman 2005). Hence, choosing the appropriate methodology and research methods are a matter of choice and logic.

The research methodology offers a structured inquiry process to find answers to the research problem or create new knowledge (Grinnell 1993). The research methodology is a rationale decision taken by the researcher to see the reality from a particular standpoint (McNeill and Chapman, 2005).

Mouton & Marais (1988) proposed a definition for social science research as “a collaborative human activity, in which social reality is studied objectively with the aim of gaining a valid understanding of it”. They have emphasised the following dimensions of social science research along with the definition.

1. The sociological dimension - scientific research is a joint or collaborative activity;

2. The ontological dimension - research in the social sciences is always directed at an aspect or aspects of social reality;
3. The ideological dimension - as a human activity, research in the social sciences is intentional and goal-directed, its main aim being the understanding of phenomena;

4. The epistemological dimension - the aim is not merely to understand phenomena, but rather to provide a valid and reliable understanding of reality;

5. The methodological dimension - research in the social sciences may be regarded as objective by virtue of its being critical, balanced, unbiased, systematic, and controllable.

They further argue that the methodological dimension encompasses the above mentioned principles. It can be attained, and these principles bring a methodological nature to the research in social science. Thus, it is vital for a social science researcher to engage in these principles, or some of it, making the research methodologically legitimate.

The ontology and epistemology determine the paradigm and phenomena to be researched. Couch (1987:106) summarises the methodological quarrels in the following manner:

“The ontological and epistemological positions of these research traditions provide the foundation of one of the more bitter quarrels in contemporary sociology. Each side claims that the frame of thought they promote provides a means for acquiring knowledge about social phenomena, and each regards the efforts of the other as, at best, misguided. They [the positions] differ on what phenomena should be attended to, how one is to approach phenomena, and how the phenomena are to be analysed.”

Lawrence (2014) points out that ontology is commonly understood as what exists, or what the fundamental nature of reality is. He describes ontology to have basically two different positions, and they are ‘realist’ and ‘nominalist’.
The realist sees the world as a pre-constructed category or structure that needs to be explored, whereas a nominalist sees the world independent of the pre-existing meanings and interpretation.

He explains epistemology as “what we need to do to produce knowledge and what scientific steps are to be taken to produce the knowledge”. According to him, the realist uses evidence gathered through observation that is free from one’s own thoughts and perceptions. Likewise, a nominalist believes that observation can be distorted by influence of our own subjective stands. Instead, the nominalist chooses to offer interpretations of what people think and believe.

The nominalist and realist use methodologies that are unique to their ontological and epistemological streams. There are three major paradigms in social science. These are positivism, interpretive social science and critical social science.

**Interpretivism as Ontological Position of this Study**

The history of interpretivism can be traced to Plato’s argument that reality cannot be understood only through senses. Philosophers like Kant and Dilthey advocated the component of ‘verstehen’ meaning ‘understanding’ in social science research over empiricism.

Other scholars who developed Interpretivism traditions were Heinrich Rickert and Max Weber. The interpretive line of thought was further experimented and developed in phenomenology and Gestalt psychology traditions. Jerry et al (2007) in thier book ‘Foundations of Qualitative Research’ articulated that interpretive paradigm is founded on the platform of rationalism and relativism. Rationalism as a process has reasoning, vital for understanding and relativism stands on the idea that perception is shaped by experience.
Accordingly, interpretivism as a paradigm intertwines science of logic and experience as the reality. Thus, experience and its meanings in this paradigm are incomparable between individuals and their phenomena.

Through centuries, and till today, one core assumption on which the interpretivist operates is that human beings are social animals. They are capable of constructing their own reality through individual experience or through group experiences in the context of their existence.

Interpretivism as an ontological paradigm is called as the theory of understanding, and members of this tradition believed that theories emerging from it can be sensitive and provide greater insight on the common situation.

Interpretivists largely opposed logical positivism as it limits its understanding with casual reasoning. Instead, they advocated for understanding actions and its motives in the social circumstances.

The researcher chose interpretive paradigm for the study as the researcher believes that human behaviour or actions cannot be assessed on a common platform as they have different personality traits, social, cultural and historical characteristics. Apart from these, human actions are determined by opportunities that are accessible to them. Even though they have the opportunities, the freedom to choose is questionable.

Indian context is an example of such situations in which an individual’s achievement of well-being doesn’t lie on one’s ability, but it is mostly determined by one’s social position. The researcher, being part of these contexts, has personally seen such situations in her own lifetime.

As a reflection of those experiences, the researcher believes that it is unfair to consider the elderly population as a vulnerable entity. Further, the researcher believes that even in old age, patriarchal social relations exist and that affects women’s opportunities because of gender discrimination.
Using interpretive strands as the ontological position for the study, the researcher adapted capability approach as the ideological tenants of the approach falls around the interpretive paradigm. The capability approach is fundamentally constructed on the values of equality and justice. The theoretical propositions of capability approach have an interpretive perspective of introducing each human being as diverse from each other.

Thus, the researcher has concluded that understanding older women’s well-being can become limited if it is seen as a unidirectional paradigm. Hence, the researcher positions that interpretive paradigm would be a suitable ontological position for the capability approach.

**Qualitative Research Paradigm**

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) define qualitative research as a naturalistic and interpretive approach to study the subject matter. Bryman (2008) says that qualitative research paradigm is ontologically constructive and epistemologically interpretive in its nature. This implies that qualitative paradigm is based on the assumption that reality is constructed by an individual’s interaction in the social world. The qualitative researcher takes an interpretive stand in understanding the social reality through the participants’ interpretation.

Bogdon and Biklen (1982: 42) assert that “qualitative studies are not impressionistic reports made after a quick visit to a setting or after some conversations with a few subjects. The researcher spends considerable time in the empirical world, laboriously collecting and reviewing piles of data. The data must bear the weight of any interpretation, so the researcher must constantly confront his or her own opinions and prejudices with the data”.

Creswell (2007) says that qualitative research engages in an inductive style of inquiry, the focus is on an individual’s meaning of the situation and explanation of the complexity of the social reality.
To study the reality, the qualitative approach was branched out into different directions, and exploration of various qualitative strategies was proposed by post positivist in different disciplines. Creswell (2007) has summarised it in the following manner:

**Table 2.1**  
(Source: Creswell, 2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Qualitative Approaches</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Muhall and Oiler (1986)</td>
<td>Phenomenology, Grounded Theory, Ethnography, Historical Research</td>
<td>Nursing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Strauss and Corbin (1990)</td>
<td>Grounded Theory, Ethnography, Phenomenology, Life Histories, Conversational Analysis</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Morse (1994)</td>
<td>Phenomenology, Ethnography, Ethnoscience, Grounded Theory</td>
<td>Nursing</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
|6| Moustakas (1994)| Ethnography
Grounded Theory
Hermeneutics
Empirical Phenomenological Research
Heuristic Research
Transcendental Phenomenology| Psychology|

|7| Denzin and Lincoln (1994)| Case Studies
Ethnography
Phenomenology
Ethnomethodology
Interpretative Practices
Grounded Theory
Biographical
Historical
Clinical Research| Social Sciences|

|8| Miles and Huberman (1994)| Social Anthropology
Collaborative Social Research| Social Sciences|

|9| Slife and Williams (1995)| Categories of Qualitative Method’s
Ethnography
Phenomenology
Studies of Artifacts| Psychology|

Ethnography
Interpretive Practices
Case Studies
Grounded Theory
Life History
Narrative Authority| Social Sciences|

Thus, we see that epistemology in qualitative research has never been rigid, but it always followed a broad-shouldered ontological position of the discipline. Although the qualitative approaches have different philosophical assumptions, the researcher prefers to choose this approach for the study.
However, one cannot condense the qualitative inquiries into firm categories as qualitative methodologies are evolving with time in different disciplines. Mahtani (2004) points out that while there are many differences philosophies that add to the qualitative methodology; it is significant to understand that all streams adapt an interpretive ontological position for social inquiry. She consolidated some of the vital characteristics of qualitative methodology as follows:

- The qualitative methodology primarily focuses on unfolding the meaning of the phenomena to be studied.
- The qualitative methodology intends to reduce the distance between the primary data and the theory as the study doesn’t start with a rigid framework.
- The above two characteristics shape in developing an “emic” view (insider perspective). Thus, the meanings created in the study is from the researched.
- The qualitative research emerges with descriptive and open-ended data from the field.
- The qualitative methodology employs multiple data collection methods.
- The qualitative methodology is not a neat and sequential process as it changes with situations and circumstances in the field settings.

Within the qualitative paradigm, there are majorly applied streams of qualitative inquires. These are grounded theory; ethnography, phenomenology, case studies, and each of them have their own epistemological procedures in understanding the experience of the subject and its context.

Phenomenology as a qualitative stream is adopted in this study as the research engages in understanding life experiences of elderly women and their capabilities in their socio-cultural contexts. Within phenomenology, the researcher has chosen hermeneutic phenomenology to understand elderly women’s interpretation of their experiences and their capabilities.
Phenomenology

The word phenomenology is derived from the Greek word ‘phainoemn’ meaning “appearance”. The word phenomenology first appeared in the 18th philosophical text of Lambert, Herder, Kant and Hegel. According to them, phenomenology implies science of appearance.

In 1786, Kant used the term phenomenology to label one of the sections in his book ‘Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science’. Later, in 1889, Franz Brentano used the term to describe descriptive psychology. Edward Husserl viewed phenomenology separate from both psychology and logic and looked at it scientifically and philosophically, and it gradually became a research stream of its own.

Phenomenology is also considered as a philosophical movement. It was started by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), and although the movement had forerunners like Immanuel Kant, George Wilhelm, Friedrich Hegel and Ernt Mach, it was Edmund Husserl who officially made known the new way of doing philosophy in the first edition of his book ‘Logische Untersuchungen’ meaning “Logical Investigations”.

Husserl’s contribution helped develop phenomenology as an important European thought over the century. He encouraged his students and planned research projects to promote phenomenology in various field of consciousness.

According to Husserl, phenomenology as a phenomenological practice is a radical shift in the position of understanding realities; he emphasised the importance of bracketing of natural attitude of understanding the everyday and all the intentional acts that represents the common meaning of the world.

Husserl describes phenomenology as the scientific study of the essential structures of consciousness. In the book ‘Ideas’, he describes the process of phenomenology as not merely sensory seeing of experience, but seeing in general as the primordial consciousness of any kind whatever so.
According to Husserl, it is vital to see the world beyond constructions, preconceptions and assumptions and to understand the essences of the experiences been experienced. He doesn’t believe in constructions of meaning placed on any experience in advance drawn from culture, religion or from everyday common sense. He says that in order to see the world beyond assumptions, we need to learn the skill called ‘epoche’, meaning bracketing.

Ideal bracketing in phenomenology means total exclusion of all internal and external suppositions. Thus, bracketing is an important characteristic of phenomenology.

The beginning of phenomenology is characterised as ‘descriptive phenomenology’. The key concepts in Husserlian phenomenology are essence, intentionality and phenomenological reduction (Rancher 2003). Husserl proposes the following propositions:

- Pure phenomenological research seeks, essentially, to describe rather than explain, and to start from a perspective free from hypotheses or preconception (Husserl 1970).
- Phenomenology research contributes to deeper understanding of lived experiences, provides thick description and close analysis of lived experience to understand how meaning is created through embodied perception (Sokolowski 2000; Stewart & Mickunas 1990).

Key Concepts in Husserlian Phenomenological Research

Husserl conceptualised the phenomenological research through key concepts that can enable us to understand and extract experience in its pure form. The concepts are as follows:

1. Lived Experience:

   Lived experience is the experience of the individual’s conscious mind that makes meaning out of the situation or circumstance at a given time and at a given place. The experience is part of individual consciousness.
2. Intentionality:

According to Husserl, the meaning of the word ‘intentionality’ is a combination of the physical appearance of something and its image inside the mind that processes its meanings. He says intentionality should not be confused with ‘intentions’. According to him, intentionality is a composition of ‘noema’ and ‘noesis’. He describes noema as an act that is experienced by the person in his or her situation, and noesis as the process in a way it is experienced by the person.

3. Epoche (Bracketing):

This is the first step in the phenomenological reduction process. The researcher sets aside, or brackets, all preconceived notions about the phenomenon to possible extent. This allows the researcher to fully understand the experience from the participant’s own point of view. Firstly, bracketing is a process of settings aside, suspending, or holding in abeyance presuppositions around a specific phenomenon. Second, bracketing engages in the process of focusing on the essences and structure of the phenomenon. Therefore, bracketing leads to description of the immediate phenomenon or to understand the essential universality of the phenomenon studied.

4. Phenomenological reduction:

The eventual goal of the phenomenological reduction is to reduce the meanings of the experience to their essential structure. The researcher uses the textural description to reveal what happened and its structural meanings of how the phenomenon was experienced.
5. Essential or Essence:

Van Manen (1997) defines essence as that which makes a thing what it is. For example, it seeks to answer questions like *what is it like for me in my world*. In other words, ‘essence’ is the meaning of the experience before the social and cultural meanings are attached to it.

6. Horizontalisation:

It is a process of identifying statements that explains the horizon of experience, which constitutes the meaning of the phenomenon experienced.

7. Imaginative Variation:

Imaginative variation is a structural description of the experience. The structural description investigates *how* the phenomenon is experienced, looking at all possible alternative meanings and perspectives of the experience.

8. Synthesis:

It is a process of integration of the experiences, meanings, essences evolved by discussing with the subject.

**Purpose of Phenomenological research**

Phenomenological research emphasises on subjectivity and discovery of the essences of experiences. It provides a systematic and disciplined methodology for derivation of knowledge. The purpose of the phenomenological approach is to illuminate the specific, to identify phenomena and how they are perceived by the actors in a situation.
In the human sphere, this normally translates into gathering ‘deep’ information and perceptions through inductive, qualitative methods such as interviews, discussions and participant observation, and representing it from the perspective of the research participant (Stan Lester, 1999). Stewart and Mickunas (1990) stressed on four philosophical perspectives in phenomenology. They are as follows:

- **Return to the traditional task of philosophy:** He believed that philosophy should return to its original concept of ‘search for wisdom’, rather than focusing on empiricism.
- **A philosophy without presuppositions:** It is important to follow ‘epoche’ in phenomenology as it can present the natural attitude of the experience.
- **The intentionality of consciousness:** The consciousness is made up of both object and subject; and, according to Husserl, reality consists of both subject and object in its natural appearance in the consciousness.
- **The refusal of subject-object dichotomy:** Thus, reality is the experience of the object within the individual meaning of experience.

Phenomenology research contributes to deeper understanding of lived experiences, provides thick description and close analysis of lived experience to understand how meaning is created through embodied perception (Sokolowski, 2000)

Van Kaam (1966) operationalised empirical phenomenological research in psychology. He investigated the experience of ‘feeling understood’. He probed the high school and college students to recollect a situation or situations ‘in which they felt they were understood by someone, such as their mother, father, girlfriend or boyfriend. This is one of the pioneer empirical phenomenological research studies using phenomenology as a research method.
Giogi (1985) outlines two descriptive levels of the empirical phenomenology approach.

- Level 1: The original data is compiled of naive description obtained through open-ended questions and dialogue.

- Level 2: The researcher defines the structure of experience through reflective analysis and interpretation of the research participant’s story or event.

Following Husserl, other thinkers who played a catalyst role in strengthening the phenomenological tradition were Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty. The essential purpose of the phenomenological research, as advocated by all of them, is to ease an individual’s experience with a phenomenon and describe its universal essence (Van Manen, 1997).

In this study, the researcher assumes those elderly women’s experiences of their capabilities and its interpretation has two levels.

- Level one - an elderly woman’s own interpretation of the experience.
- Level two - her interpretation is influenced by her own socio-cultural, historical and economical contexts.

**Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

Hermeneutic phenomenology was proposed by Martin Heidegger (1962) through his writing in ‘Being and Time’. According to Heidegger, an individual’s life experience and his or her interpretation of those experiences are influenced by the cultural-historical context through which the individual has lived. He introduces a German term, ‘Dasein’, which means that the individual’s existence cannot be explained in any other term, but with his or her contexts and that context gives existential meaning to the individual. Heidggger also says that an individual’s understanding of being is influenced by the pre-existing structure in the world (Odman 1988).
Later, Gadamer and Van Manen worked on the preposition of Heidegger on the empiricism of ‘being’. Gadamer (1975) worked on hermeneutic phenomenology in his influential book ‘Truth and Method’. He said that “understanding is not to be thought of so much as an action of one’s subjectivity, but as the placing of oneself within a process of tradition, in which past and present are constantly fused” (Gadamer 1975: 258).

Heidegger (1817), in his lecture on ‘Identity and Difference’, introduced representative thinking as a characteristic of the metaphysical. Hence, he believed that a metaphysical state of being is not completely abstract, and human beings are capable of connecting the representative thinking to consciousness. He strongly advocated that human beings have the capacity to think through provoking thoughts. He describes ‘dasien’ as the experience of human beings in the process of thinking and reflection. He claims that human beings are not encouraged to engage in the thinking process because culture and tradition, which do not allow them to think in newer ways. He proposes that human beings unlearn and engage in thinking process in order to experience being.

Heidegger views language as the outcome of the thinking process. For him, thinking is a collection of memories that enables one to refer and connect to past experiences. Therefore, according to him, present thinking has a reference and influence of past. In Heidegger phenomenology, individuals are capable of understanding or can be aware of his or her experience and can interpret the experiences. An individual can expand his or her horizon of understanding the world through interpretation of these experiences. Further, he says that by repeated processes of interpretation of the experiences, he or she will be aware of his or her ability to learn new things and the understanding could be broadened.
In this study, the researcher believes that through hermeneutic phenomenology as the epistemological stand, one can understand how elderly women are able to explain, interpret and reflect upon their choices and freedom in life. Thus, the researcher chose to see elderly women’s experiences and its influences on their capability, functioning and deprivation in their social locations.

**Empirical Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

Max Van Manen (1997) suggested six activities to bring out the experiences in a more empirical form. He suggests the following methodological structure in hermeneutic phenomenological research:

1. **Turning to the nature of lived experience**

   In this stage, the researcher engages in orientating oneself with the phenomenon of the study. He or she starts formulating the phenomenological questions and explains the assumptions and pre-understanding of the context.

2. **Investigating experience as we live it**

   The researcher, at this stage, uses personal experience as a starting point for the rapport-building process with the subject. The researcher tries to recover the etymological sources. He or she attempts to understand idiomatic phrases used by the subject while sharing the experience.

3. **Hermeneutic Phenomenological Reflection**

   At this stage, the researcher engages in writing the descriptive narratives of the subject’s experience of the phenomenon.
The writing is followed by phenomenological reflections and repetitive readings. The reflective reading is followed by thematic analysis and substantiating statements from the narratives.

4. Hermeneutic Phenomenological Writing

The thematic analysis should attend to the subject’s language and speech, and this involves writing the exact way the subject expressed himself or herself.

5. Maintaining a Strong and Oriented Position

The descriptive writing of the themes and narratives is characteristic in the oriented way.

6. Balancing the Research Context

The research should represent the nuisances in the working the text.

Max Van Manen (1997), in his book ‘Researching Lived Experience’, explained in detail about each step mentioned above for extracting hermeneutic phenomenological experiences. Husserl had explained bracketing and phenomenological reduction as core methodological requirements for conducting phenomenological research. Max Van Manen’s methodological structure does not show any deviance from those characteristics. But, instead, adds another layer of interpretation into its methodological structure.

In this study, the researcher proposes to use the idea of Max Van Manen and tries to understand the experiences of elderly women’s capabilities in their pre-understanding structure of gender inequalities, embedded in their context.
Research Frame

Universe

The researcher conducted the study in Chennai. The researcher had three rationales for conducting the study in Chennai. Firstly, Chennai is situated in Tamil Nadu, which is experiencing population ageing (Census 2011). As per the recent census, it is seen that the southern part of India is demographically ageing more rapidly as compared to the northern part of India. Secondly, Chennai being a metropolitan city, the probability of interviewing elderly women from diverse social positions in the same geographical location can be comparably advantageous. Thirdly, in qualitative studies, especially in phenomenological studies, language has a vital role in articulating descriptive narratives. The researcher, being a native of Chennai is comfortable with the native language. Hence, the phenomenological research had all the three aspects that benefit the study.

Construction of the Sample

Mitchell (1983) says the authenticity of qualitative analysis depends on the quality of the analysis rather than the size of the sample. Samples are chosen in a study as they have particular characteristics that will enable the researcher to understand the central themes that the researcher wishes to explore (Bryman, 2008).

Patton (1990) says that qualitative studies particularly focus on in-depth, purposively-selected, small samples for the study. He further says that logic for purposive sampling is selecting information - rich cases for the study. According to him, information-cases are those cases that give rich information about the issue of importance under studied. He proves wide ranges of purposive sampling techniques within purposive sample frame. In this study, the researcher sees elderly women’s life experiences in the space of social stratification.
As the study tries to understand elderly women’s capability in the space of social stratification, the researcher chooses participants that represent the dimensions of social stratification.

On the other hand, a sample in a phenomenological study is a person who has experienced the situation or condition or event or has the knowledge of the phenomena (Holloway 1997).

Thus, the sample constructed for the study is purposive with maximum variation. According to Patton (1990), the maximum variation sampling is a strategy for selecting a sample that captures and describes the central theme outcome that cuts across the participant variation. He says such process has two kinds of results: Firstly, documentation of uniqueness and detailed description from each case. Secondly, it yields patterns that cut across the cases and its importance emerges from heterogeneity.

The figure 2.1, shows how elderly women from various social stratification view capabilities. The maximum variation sampling helps the researcher identify elderly women’s similarity in functioning of their capabilities and its difference in different social locations.

Likewise, the figure 2.1, shows the capability deprivation of elderly women on a similar platform, but in a different context. Therefore, maximum variation sampling in the study indicates how elderly women with different social characteristics see functioning and deprivation experiences in old age.

In this study, the researcher identifies elderly women of above 60 years, who have different intersections of social positions characterised by caste, marital status, employment and educational background. The sample of the study is not only phenomenological in nature, but it also reflects its social position in the social arrangement. The figure 2.2 represents dimensions of the sample in the study.
Figure 2.1: Maximum Variation Sampling
Figure 2.2 Dimensions of the Sample

- Marital Status
- Employment
- CASTE
- Education

Elderly Women
**Data Collection Process**

1. Preparing the Interview Schedule

The researcher prepared a tentative interview guide for the phenomenological interview of the elderly women. The tentative interview guide had questions related to each capability in an open-ended format.

The questions related to capabilities were structured thematically under four headings, such as health, work, social relation and social environment. The questions were mostly explorative in nature and had leading questions. The tentative interview guide is attached in the annexure.

2. Process of Data Collection

The researcher identified participants through reference (snowballing) in the North Chennai locality. As the study focuses on understanding capabilities of elderly women from different social positions, snowballing technique facilitated in achieving the diversity. The researcher prepared a list of 30 participants, who might show interest in sharing their life experience, through snowballing method.

The researcher started contacting elderly women, took appointments to visit the participants and explained the research study. Twenty-one participants gave oral consent. The researcher tried to capture the experiences of elderly women’s capabilities through phenomenological interviews.

3. Process of Interviewing

The interview process for the study took place according to the convenience of the participants. The interview had nearly four to five sessions of an hour each, spread across four to five days. The location of the interview was selected according to the participant’s wish.
• Stage 1

The initial stage of the interview was mostly engaged in building rapport with the participant. The researcher, in this stage, was more of a listener; the researcher was listening to the participants’ world views and achievements. The researcher answered every question posted by the participant about the study and clarified their doubts.

• Stage 2

The researcher started to observe day-to-day activities of the participants. The researcher tried to relate the research questions in alignment with their day-to-day activities. For example, if the participant took any tablet for any illness. The researcher initiated conversations about the elderly woman’s current health issues, her support system for recovery, her understanding of health and its related experience. The researcher probed and tried to understand the elderly woman’s health from a life course perspective.

• Stage 3

At the end of the interview, the researcher tried to document the experiences shared by the participants and tried to capture the meaning of the experiences through her writings. The researcher clarified her doubts the next day during the conversation with the participant. The interview process continued till the researcher gathered experiences of the participants under thematically arranged capabilities.

• Stage 4

The researcher facilitated the participants to orientate back to their day-to-day activities, as the interviewing process had situations, in which the participants had to relive her past experiences. The researcher concluded the interview by sharing her experiences about the process with the participants. The researcher left the participants’ house on a friendly note.
4. Data Analysis

The researcher started transcribing the data (experiences shared by the participants). The researcher started arranging the experiences in the chronological manner and presented the narratives, both in first and third person voice.

The researcher started identifying experiences of the participants under each thematically categorised capability. Then, common pattern emerging from the participants from different social positions were listed. Then, the researcher analysed the emerging themes from the capability framework, as presented in the figure 2.3. The emerging themes are triangulated with the existing literature on elderly women. The researcher followed Max Van Manen steps in data collection and in analysis of the data. The steps are as follows:

1. Turning to the nature of the experience and investigating how they live it

The researcher formulated questions in such a manner that the elderly women were able to narrate their daily routine activities. The researcher probed deeper to understand the relationship between their old age functioning experiences with their social positions.

Example:

*Do you see your marital status of being a widow affect your routines in old age?*

The researcher used ‘now and there’ process in interviews with elderly women to understand their functioning pattern, as mentioned early in this chapter. The researcher spent a considerable amount of time with the elderly women to make them think and interpret their own functioning and question its value in their life. This process helped them to realise whether they had choices in choosing the functions or behaviour that they value or to relook at whether their actions and behaviour were directed in their social context.
The researcher bracketed her pre-understanding issues on elderly women by not asking questions related to particular problems. She paraphrased the answers as questions during the interview. This avoided questions specific to any literature on elderly women. By using paraphrasing, the researcher was able to understand elderly women’s experiences and its context-specific meaning. This helped the researcher bring out the essence of their thinking process and helped them articulate.

2. Hermeneutic Phenomenological Reflection and Writing

The researcher engaged in writing the descriptive narratives of the elderly women’s experiences on their functioning. The researcher started writing the narratives as narrated by the elderly women. As the narratives had to be analysed, she created a framework in writing the narratives.

The researcher was involved in reflective process by repeatedly reading the thick descriptions of elderly women’s experiences. This process helped the researcher to arrange the life events of elderly women in a chronological manner. The researcher chose to write the narratives in such a manner that these women’s functioning in old age had a relationship with other stages of their lives. The narratives had no conclusions and ended with philosophical questions.

The narratives spoke about the elderly women’s life events and their connections to their present life. The phenomenological narratives had an essence of capturing the thinking process of the subject.

The phenomenological narratives differed from other styles of narratives by assuming that human beings have the ability to think and reflect. The elderly women have narrated their life experiences more subjectively by involving themselves in the process of reflection, something that is unique to phenomenological research.
3. Maintaining a Strong and Oriented Position and Research Context

The researcher completely bracketed her pre-assumptions on elderly women’s contextual problems and viewed their problems as central. The researcher never ranked the problems and expressed the problems in the narrative as articulated by elderly women during the process of the interview. The researcher tried to see the world through the eyes of the elderly women. This helped in restoring the elderly women’s context and originality.
Figure 2.3: Analysis Framework

Emerging Themes are analysed through the following lens:

1. Opportunity Freedom
2. Process Freedom
3. Endowment
4. Entitlement
5. Social Position
6. Structural Capacity to Act
7. Personal Capacity to Act
8. Social Capacity to Act
Methodological Challenges:

- **Reflection is cognitive rather than mere recollection of events**

The researcher found it difficult to ease the participant to deconstruct the common meanings attached to an action and facilitate them to give their own meanings to the action or behaviour or feelings. The researcher understood that construction of meaning of one’s action is not an easy process as it is represented.

The researcher has to engage in a series of discussions to explain that meaning attached to a particular behaviour or choice was a common understanding and human beings are capable of making newer meanings, and that each one has a capacity to think and interpret, according to their choices.

In the due process, the researcher understood deconstruction and construction of meaning of an experience is cognitive in nature rather than just recollection of the event.

In this process, the researcher had to cross barriers on many cognitive processes of the participant in order to extract the actual meaning constructed by them. In the process of reflection, the researcher had to peel many layers of social and cultural meanings that are learned by the participant during their socialisation.

The researcher was confronted with the task of enabling the unlearning process of the participants. It was demanded of the researcher to justify the process of unlearning. The rationale for the unlearning process was to ensure that perceptions and experiences are unique to individuals and the meaning-making process of their experience gave a newer dimension to the area of the study.
Articulation

The researcher’s assumption of considering that individuals can articulate experiences was challenged when the participants in the research study found that words were inadequate to explain their experiences. Although the researcher was successful in crossing the challenge of helping the participants to engage in meaning construction of the experiences, she felt stagnated when they were looking for the correct words to explain their feelings and name the emotions.

Thus, the task of naming the emotions was difficult for both the researcher and the participants in the study. The researcher had difficulty in controlling her anxiety in naming the emotions whenever the participant had paused or was silent or replied by just making a sound.

The interpretation of those incidents solely depended on the participant, rather than the researcher. The articulation of experiences with words that connect to emotions is less practised in day-to-day lives, especially among women in the study.

Thus, scanning for words to articulate experiences is a barrier that the researcher faced during the interview, even though the researcher and participant shared the same language for communication. The participants found it demanding to engage in articulation of their emotions attached to the experiences in their own words.

The researcher learned that all emotions do not have names and that words cannot always represent the real meaning of emotions. Thus, the researcher recorded the participant’s silence as an expression through word.
• *Researcher’s position is bleached with fluidity in handling emotions*

The researcher had barriers in handling emotions of the participants. When the participant recollects and shares their experiences with emotions, sometimes, the researcher became involved with the participant at a personal level during that moment.

For instance, the researcher was really disturbed when the participant, a homeless elderly woman spoke at length about her struggle in bringing up the children. The researcher related the participant to her mother’s position. This created emotional barriers. Later, the participant wanted guidance about old age homes and the researcher took efforts to help her.

The researcher found it challenging to just record the interview as the researcher herself realised that the human emotions cannot be restricted to mechanical interviewing, rather, it sometimes involves reacting to another human being’s suffering and agony. Of course, the researcher was able to control, but still, connecting and listening to fellow human beings’ worries can be permeable at moments.

The researcher used the concept of bracketing, and was able to bracket the influence on the participant’s meaning-making processes. On the other hand, she was found it difficult to bracket her emotional connections with the participants. The researcher felt experiences of counter-transfer between the participant and the researcher, and the reassembling back to research took some time.

The researcher learnt that narration of experience and recording of experiences also involves the researcher’s emotions, if it has to be understood from the original position of the participants.
Methodological Opportunities:

1. Understanding the processes

Phenomenological research provided the researcher with enormous opportunity to understand the process involved in the phenomena through the participants’ narration of their experiences. The researcher could understand how processes are influenced by the socio-cultural context and participants are unaware of it. During the interview processes, the participants themselves gained insights about those processes. Thus, phenomenological research journey unfolds the presence of processes to both researcher and to the participants.

The focus of phenomenological research is to understand the structures of the experience of particular phenomena. The research facilitates both the participants and the researcher to understand the processes involved in the phenomena. The insight gained on processing of the experiences strengthened the narratives, data analysis and findings of the study.

2. Concept building, Structures and Dimensions of the issued studied

Phenomenological research brings out the linkages between evolving concepts in a meticulous manner. The phenomenological research provides opportunity to comprehend emerging structures and dimensions of the issue under study. For instance, in this study, the researcher was able to understand that elderly women have become vulnerable not only because of their ageing process, but also due to their deprivation and lack of freedom to function throughout their life span. Thus, the researcher has used phenomenological research as a lens through which one can see the different interpretations of similar phenomena, enhancing the quality of the issue under study. It enables the researcher to build concepts starting from an individual’s issue to that of a larger group, thereby problematising the research concerned into a policy change.
Ethical Consideration:

The researcher followed the basic ethical principles:

- Respect for the Person

The elderly women were considered as individuals with complete autonomy and they were ensured protection from harm during their participation in the study. Their opinions and choices were respected and treated with dignity.

- Beneficence

The researcher promised the elderly women that their emotions will be respected and their reflection process of their life events will be guided and restored through gestures of kindness and care. Questions that cause disturbances were avoided and the information shared will be confidential.

- Informed Consent

The elderly women’s consent to participate in the study was mostly oral as they felt apprehensive to sign papers and even their family members did not approve of it.

- Selection of Subject

The elderly women were selected through voluntary process. They were not forced or compelled to participate in the study. They were also given the option to leave the study in between, if they felt that the process was dissatisfying. Thus, the researcher encouraged the elderly women to exercise their autonomy during the process of the study.