

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a social justice model of research that aims to:

- empower research participants to take action to improve conditions in their lives
- remove the traditional hierarchy of researchers having expertise and power
- support participants to become 'co-researchers', by leading the research according to their needs

A feminist approach to PAR aims to:

- value and bring to the foreground women's lived experiences and voices
- explicitly acknowledges oppression of women
- acknowledge and challenge the hidden inequality of power relations between women and men, which is often perpetuated in mainstream structures and institutions.
- ensures we keep a gendered analysis embedded throughout the project
- upholds WRC's value of being a feminist organisation

A framework for Feminist Participatory Action Research:

Critique of androcentric underpinnings of dominant social science research

- Give discussion of gender a central place
- Give inclusive feminism, which recognizes and celebrates diversity, a central place in theoretical debates
- Give explicit attention to gender in all phases of the research, including evaluation
- Look at benefits from the research; men, women or both
- Pay attention to gender language use
- Pay attention to composition of the research team

(Maguire, 1987, p105-108)

"Like participatory researchers, feminists claim that knowledge is power. They too have exposed the power relations inherent in the production of knowledge. In fact the control of knowledge is one of the most critical arenas of feminist struggles. Although participatory research has highlighted the centrality of power in the social construction of knowledge, only feminist research has highlighted the centrality of male power as a factor in the construction of knowledge."

(Maguire, 1987, p81)

Examples of Feminist Participatory Action Research:

- Battered women in New Mexico worked together to develop collective solutions to their shared problems of having experienced male violence.
- Women's organisations developing local strategies to embed gender equality in the UK (Oxfam pilots).
- Empowering rural women in Australia to discuss and use interactive communication technologies (ICT).

- HIV nurses in Africa mapping their experiences using photo-vision and challenging authorities for more resources.

Participatory Action Research is...

(following notes taken from training with Cathy Sharp, SRA)

“a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes. . . . It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities”. (Reason & Bradbury, 2001)

- Has an explicit emancipatory agenda.
- Collaborative inquiry - *by* and *with*, rather than *on* people.
- Draws on many forms of evidence or ‘ways of knowing’.
- Focus on what people *do*, rather than what they *say* - knowledge developed is tested out in the real world where it will ultimately be applied.
- Research *in* action, not on action.
- Cycles of action and reflection.
- Research as dialogue across a system. Draws on multiple perspectives.

“Participatory action research is not just research which we hope will be followed by action! It is action which is researched, changed and re-researched, within the research process by participants. Nor is it simply an exotic variant of consultation. Instead, it aims to be active co-research, by and for those to be helped” (Wadsworth, Y 1998).

- “Evidence about good practice is failing to become good practice”. (Sharp, 2005)
- Widespread assumption that action follows inquiry.
- The generation of the evidence is not part of an embedded process which allows it to be ‘tested’ and evaluated in context.
- “...the emphasis of qualitative and interpretive approaches to research has been *on representation of the World rather than action within it*” (Denizen and Lincoln, 2000)
- “Action” often used interchangeably with social change.
- “Expectations regarding action may differ considerably and smaller, achievable, personal/local actions may go unrecognised...” (Reid et al. 2006)