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Netherlands Network of Human Rights Research (NNHRR)

PhD Training (1st/2nd year)

Utrecht University, Janskerkhof 2-3, Room 0.21.

First Day: Methodology of Human Rights Research – The Basics – 15 April 2026

8.30-9am Coffee

9:00-9.30 Opening

9.30-11.00 Methodology in legal scholarship

The first session will provide an overview and critical reflection to what methodology means in 'legal scholarship'. It will chart different methodological approaches including legal doctrinal research, comparative legal research, empirical legal studies, critical perspectives and interdisciplinary research.

11.00-11.30 Coffee

11.30-13:00 Essential questioning workshop

In this session, we will shift the focus from finding answers to asking research questions. We will use a step-by-step strategy (the Question Formulation Technique) on how to formulate, work with, and use the questions participants create, and design an action plan to work on their answers.

13.00-14.00 Lunch (Janskerkhof)

14:00-15:30 Researcher positionality and participatory (action) research

In this session, participants are introduced to the notion of social positionality as an aspect of self-reflexivity in research. We discuss how one's social position (and privileges),



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perspectives and worldview might impact one's research and the relationship to the research subjects (or participants). Through concrete examples and practices, participants are encouraged to reflect on the possibilities and limitations of their positionality, as well as on the place and role of their respondents (or participants) in their research. We thereby briefly look into the possibilities for participatory (action) elements in the research design.

15:30-16:30 Panel discussion on critical perspectives in research

Critical theories - including critical race theory, critical feminism, queer and post-colonial theory- focus on power and can provide a very fruitful lense through which to approach human rights issues, which are often about structural dominance and safeguarding the interests of marginalised groups. However, critical theory does not figure prominently in many law school curriculums. In this panel discussion researchers will share their experiences on how they came to adopt critical perspectives and how this has influenced their research.

18.00 Social event followed by dinner

Second day: Broadening the methodological toolkit – 16 April 2026

9:00-10:30 Critical discourse analysis

This session will offers a concise introduction to critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a tool for exploring how power differentials, structural inequalities and meaning are negotiated and constructed within legal/policy texts. Rather than treating such texts as neutral, CDA is valuable in uncovering the assumptions and ideologies embedded in policy-making, legislation, and jurisprudence. The aim of this session is twofold. First, key concepts of critical discourse studies will be tackled and problematized. Upon that conceptual framework, concrete strategies and examples will be provided in order to map out alternatives and possibilities for a reflexive, critical and sharp engagement with various relevant data sources.

10:30-11:00 Coffee

11:00-12:30 Digital Ethnography: The art of studying the Online

Digital space provides a wealth of information from images, texts, and videos. This makes the data wealthy digital space another frontier for researchers. This session will cover different methods of studying digital space by exploring the different methods within digital



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ethnography. Participants will have the opportunity to examine how researchers can observe, interpret, and analyze online cultures, communities, and interactions

12:30-13:30 Lunch (Janskerkhof)

13:30-15:00 The Semi-structured interview

This session explores semi-structured interviews as a fundamental qualitative research method. Participants are invited to reflect on why interviews are used as a research method, how to select respondents, and how to gain access. Attention will be given to interview design, including different types of questions and the role of the interviewer.

15:00-15:30 Coffee

15:30-16:30 Co-creation/citizen science – how to research with and for communities?

There is a pressing need for more inclusive research practices, which is recognised by researchers, funding bodies and community organisations. The need to actively involve a more diverse range of voices in research, such as individuals experiencing homelessness or vulnerable housing, to name a few, is increasing. Individuals and groups are often excluded despite their valuable insights due to systemic barriers, such as lack of opportunity or confidence to participate, limited access to resources and inflexible research structures. As a result, their perspectives are frequently missing from studies that shape policies and services. This is also the case for legal studies. In this session, we explore the principles of citizen science and co-creation, discuss their applicability in legal research and, after identifying the key stakeholders for each project, we set up a roadmap that PhD candidates could apply there.

16:30-17:00 Plenary closing

17:00 Drinks