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From design to practice: how can large-scale household surveys better represent the complexities of the social units under investigation?

Conference Item

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**From Design to Practice:
how can large-scale household surveys
better represent the complexities of the
social units under investigation?**

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Tale of two studies

Study 1:

PFRU Households' Financial Well-being Survey (2011)

- to ascertain 'financial well-being' of South African households by collecting information on income, expenditure, assets and liabilities.

Study 2:

Qualitative follow-up survey

- To establish extent to which Study 1 managed to capture different types of household situations



Outline

1. Brief overview of problem with household surveys
2. Background to studies
3. Findings of qualitative study
4. Reflections:
 - What lessons can be learnt from this tale??
 - What lessons can be learnt with regards to quantitative survey design and understanding specific dimensions of 'household' units
5. Conclusion: Suggestions for moving forward



UNISA

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1. Problem with household surveys

Extent to which able to capture and represent complexities of households

- statistical household often formulated to avoid double counting
- Households are multi-dimensional and fluid
- South African context



2. Background to Studies

Study 1:

PFRU Household Financial Well-being Survey (2011)

Set out to ascertain financial well-being of South African households by collecting information on income, expenditure, assets and liabilities.

- **Design stage:**
 - Financial expert consultation
 - Included discussions on how to define a household
 - Review of questionnaire by financial and budget survey design experts
- **Methodology**
 - A questionnaire completed - face-to-face (n=1777) or telephonically (n=1160)
 - Questionnaire in English, translated by interviewers as required



2. Background to Studies

Study 2:

Qualitative follow-up survey

Set out to establish extent to which Study 1 managed to capture different types of household situations; to understand the processes determining this

1. Identified key concepts within study 1
2. Investigated survey designers' and interviewers' understandings of key concepts and
3. Did repeat interviews with 'households' using more nuanced approach to establish inter- and intra-familial and/or financial links and dependencies.



Key concepts in survey

Household:

- STATS SA definition:

*... a person, or group of persons, who occupy a common dwelling unit (or part of it) for **at least four nights in a week** on average during the past four weeks prior to the survey interview. Basically, **they live together and share resources as a unit**. Other explanatory phrases can be 'eating from the same pot' and 'cook and eat together'. (STATS SA 2009).*

- '4 x 4 rule' too limiting for financial study
 - focuses on co-residency



Key concepts in survey

Survey household definition:

Household is defined as an **economic unit** consisting of a person living alone or a group of people who **live together** in the same private dwelling and **share expenditures** including the joint provision of the essentials of living. Employees of other residents (i.e. live-in domestic servants, au-pairs, etc.) and roommates without other family or partnership attachments to household members (e.g. resident boarders, lodgers, tenants, visitors, etc.) are considered as separate households.

Subject to the further and specific conditions shown below, the following persons must, if they **share household expenses**, be **regarded as household members**:

1. persons usually resident, but temporarily absent from dwelling (for reasons of holiday, travel, work, education or similar)
2. children of household being educated away from home
3. persons **absent for long periods, but having household ties**: persons working away from home
4. persons temporarily absent **but having household ties**: persons in hospital, nursing home, boarding school or other institution.

Key concepts in survey

Wealth Creation Unit (WCU)

- Individuals with familial links who pool their funds with the purpose of long-term financial well-being
- Questions raised:
 - Are wealth creation units households?
 - Are households always wealth creation units?
 - Might a household constitute more than one wealth creation unit?



Key concepts in survey

Financially Knowledgeable Person (FKP):

The person who is most knowledgeable on financial matters regarding both the household as a whole and its individual members. He/she will be invited to provide a large part of the information requested during the interview.



Qualitative study:

Group interviews with fieldworkers: understandings of concepts

- Household concept
 - Lack of clarity: individual or group of people
 - Different language translations: 'family' or 'home'
 - Inconsistent inclusion/exclusion of 'absent' members
- FKP
 - Often person who was there
 - Different understandings of FKP and therefore who asked to interview: 'the mother', household head, the main breadwinner
 - Some interviewers expressed preference to interview either men or women



Qualitative study: Interviews with 'households'

- Nuclear-type units in all race groups
 - Are they households? – '4 x 4 rule' and survey definition
 - Are they 'wealth creation units'?
 - Ambiguities: who should be included/excluded?



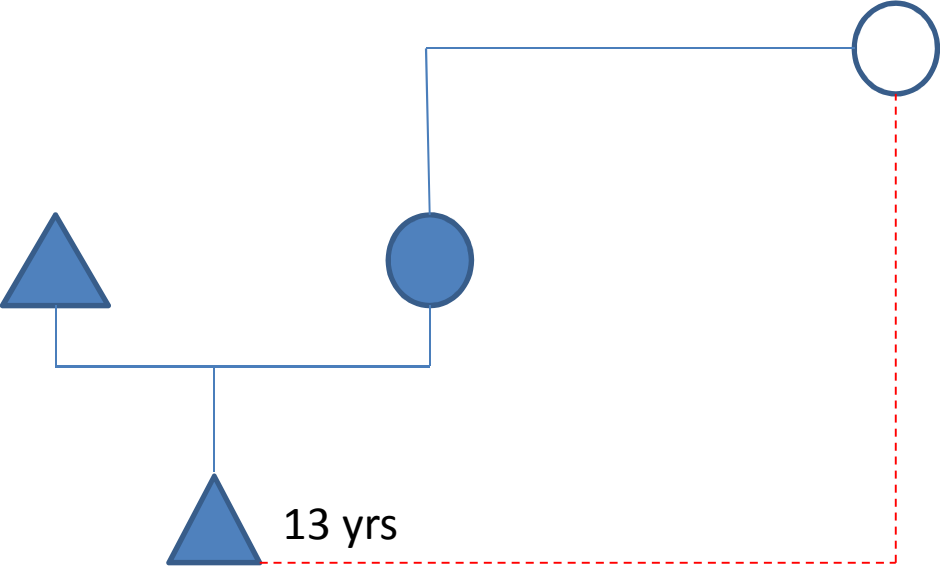
Qualitative study: Interviews with 'households'

Complex and fluid multi-generational units

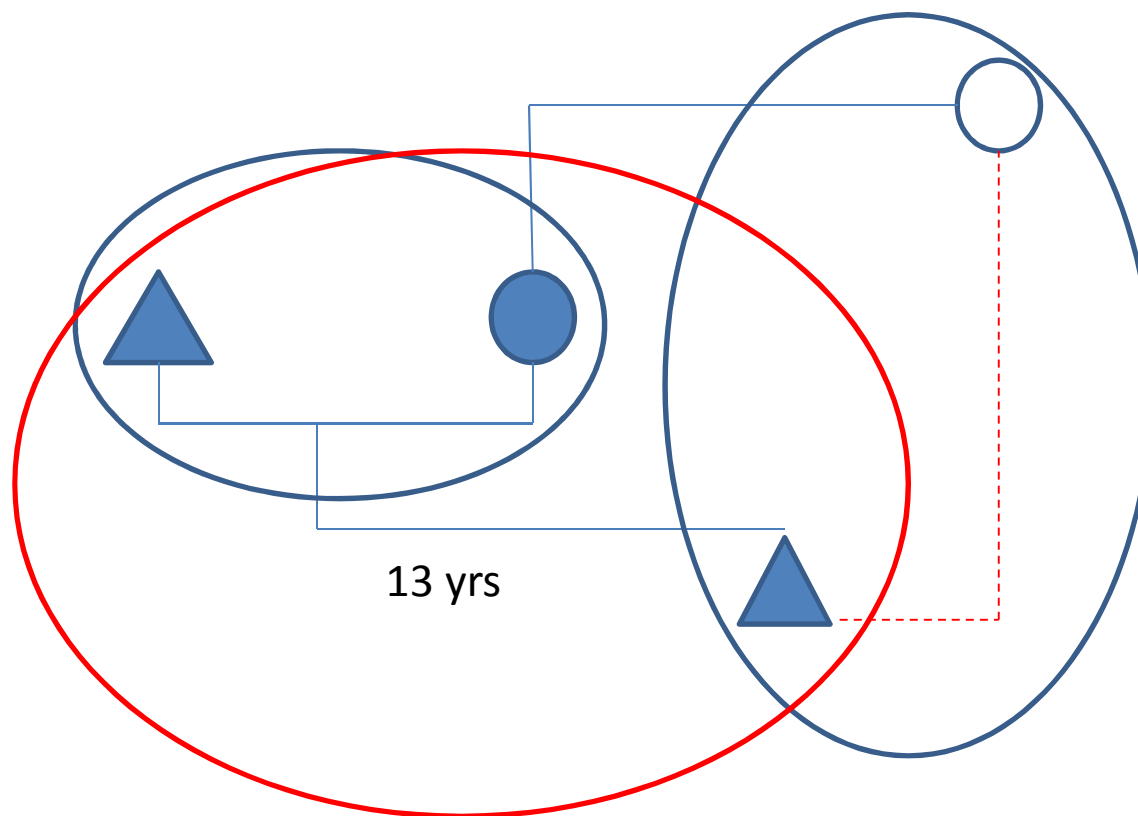
- Difficulty in capturing more complex household structure
- Obvious incorrect inclusions and omissions in original survey
- Ambiguous inclusions / omissions in original survey
- Relationships recorded with household head only



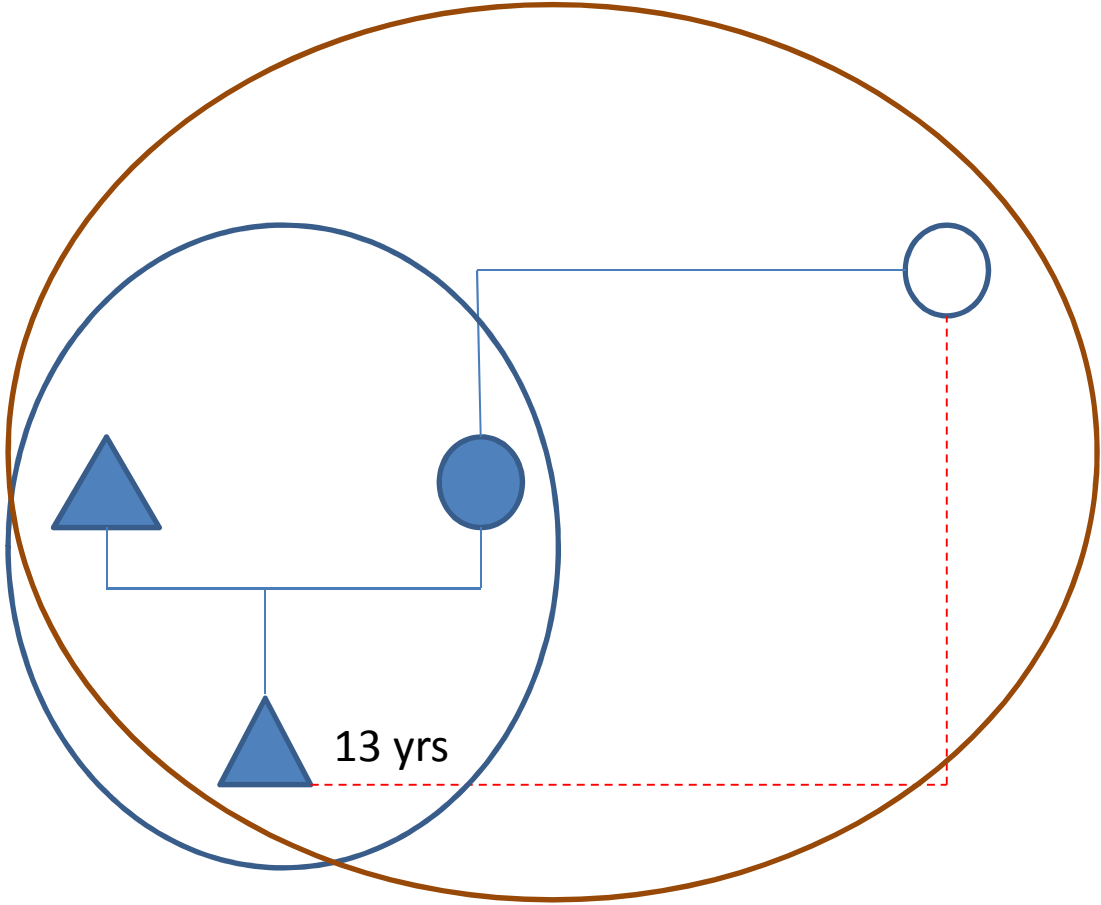
Example: Soweto, Gauteng



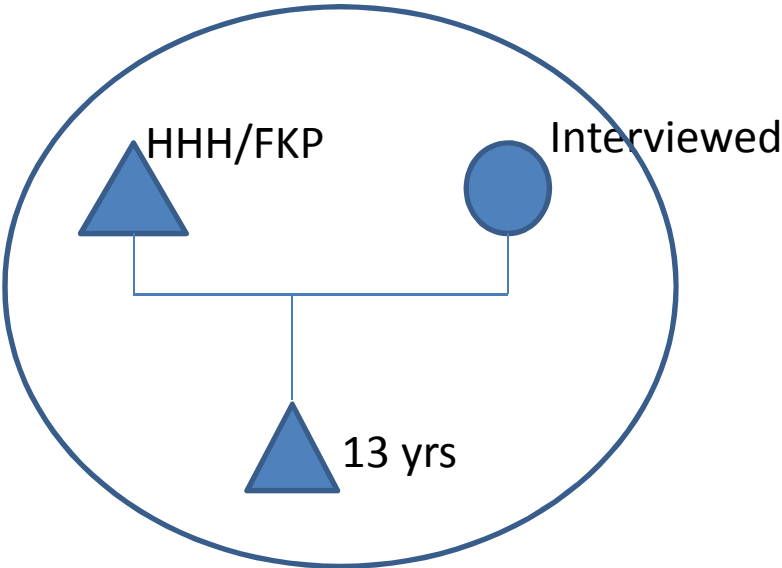
Residential Units
Survey household



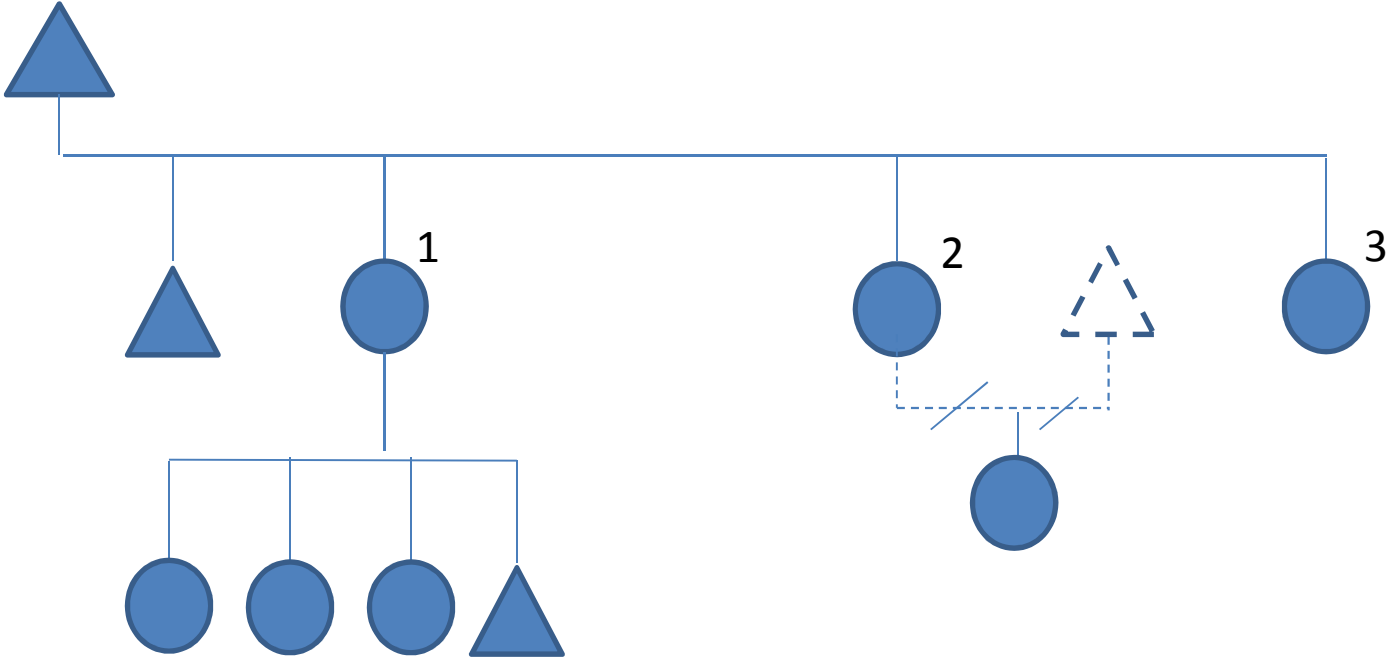
Wealth Creation Unit?



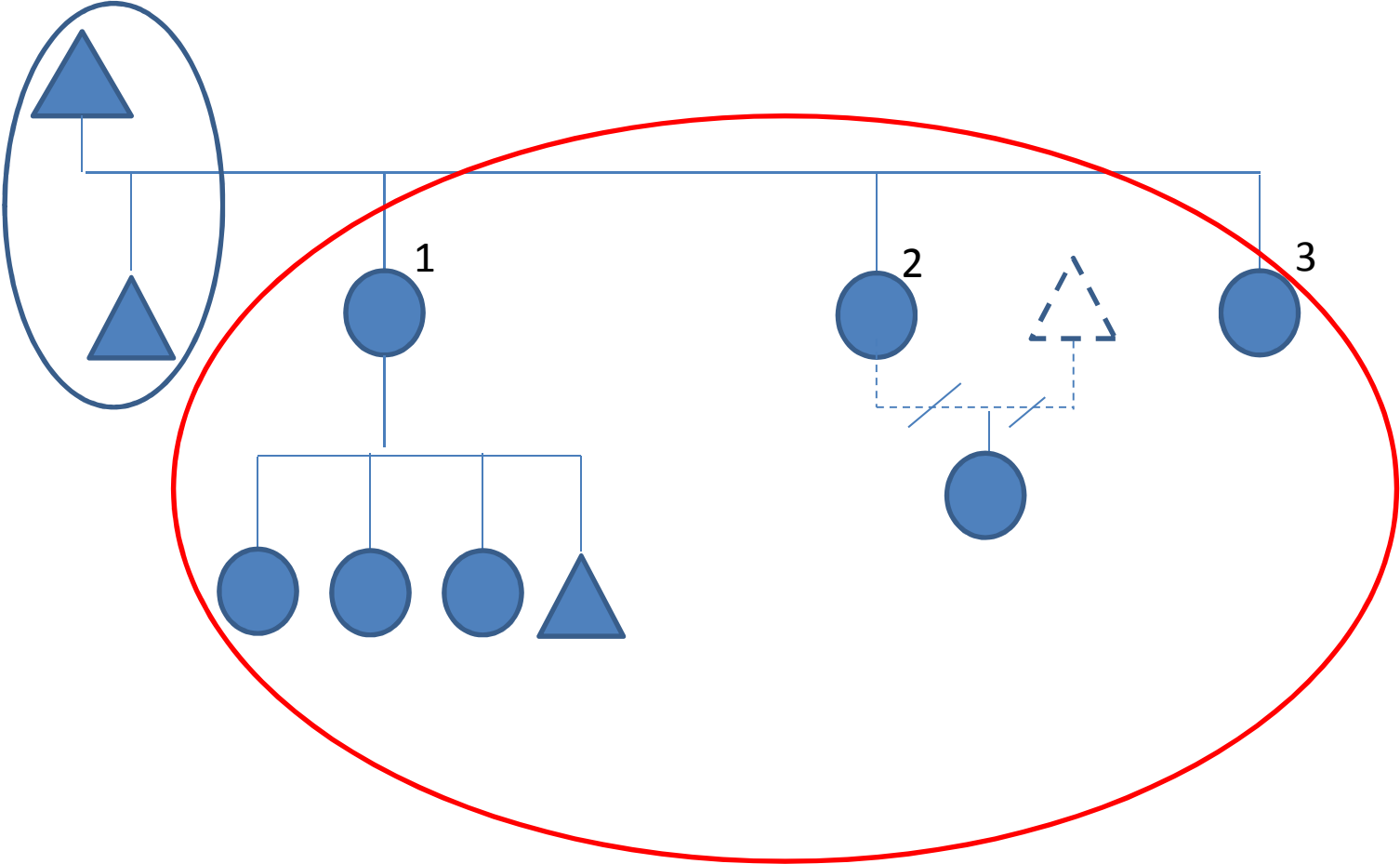
Enumerated unit



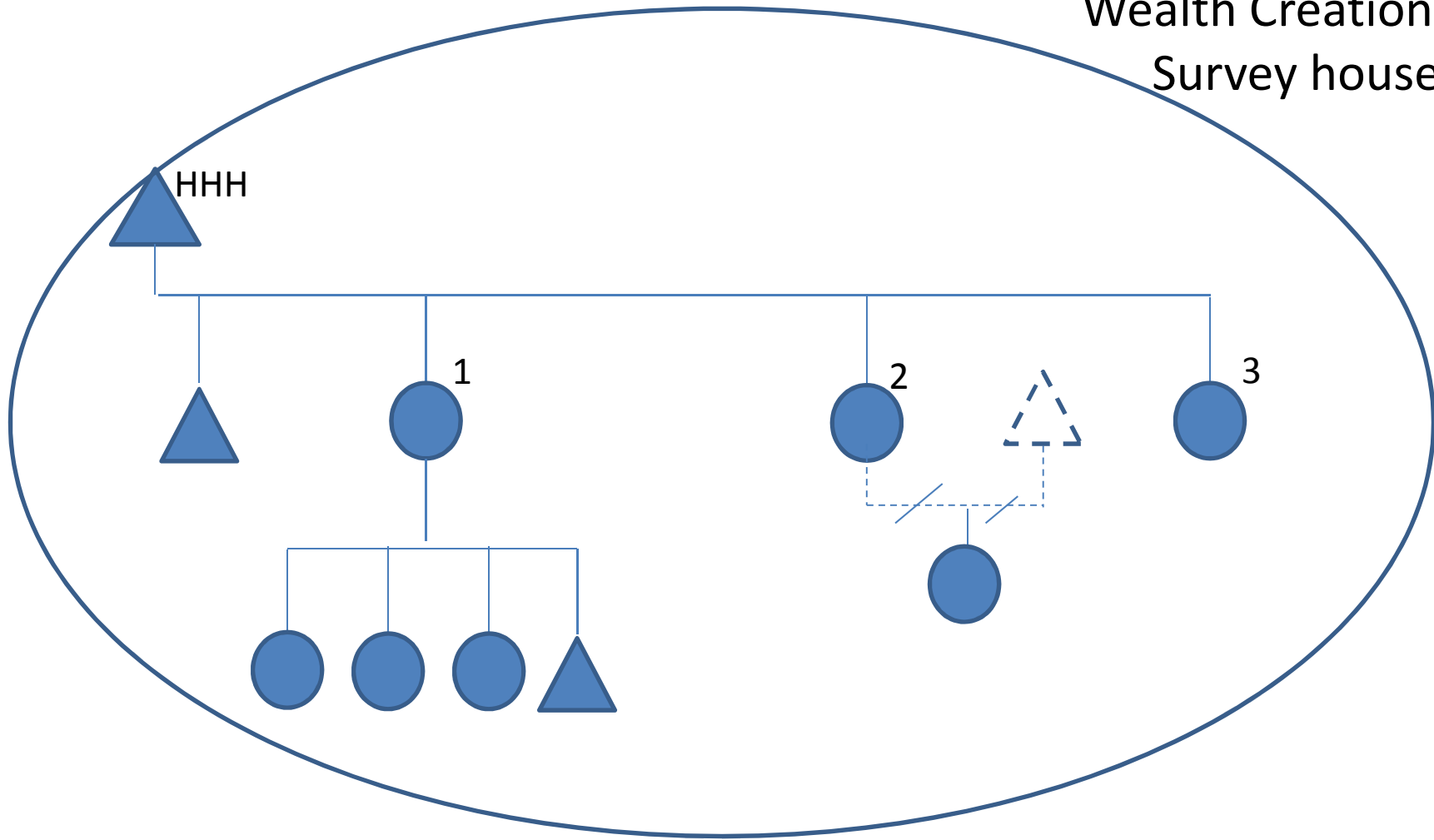
Example: Ga-Maja, Limpopo



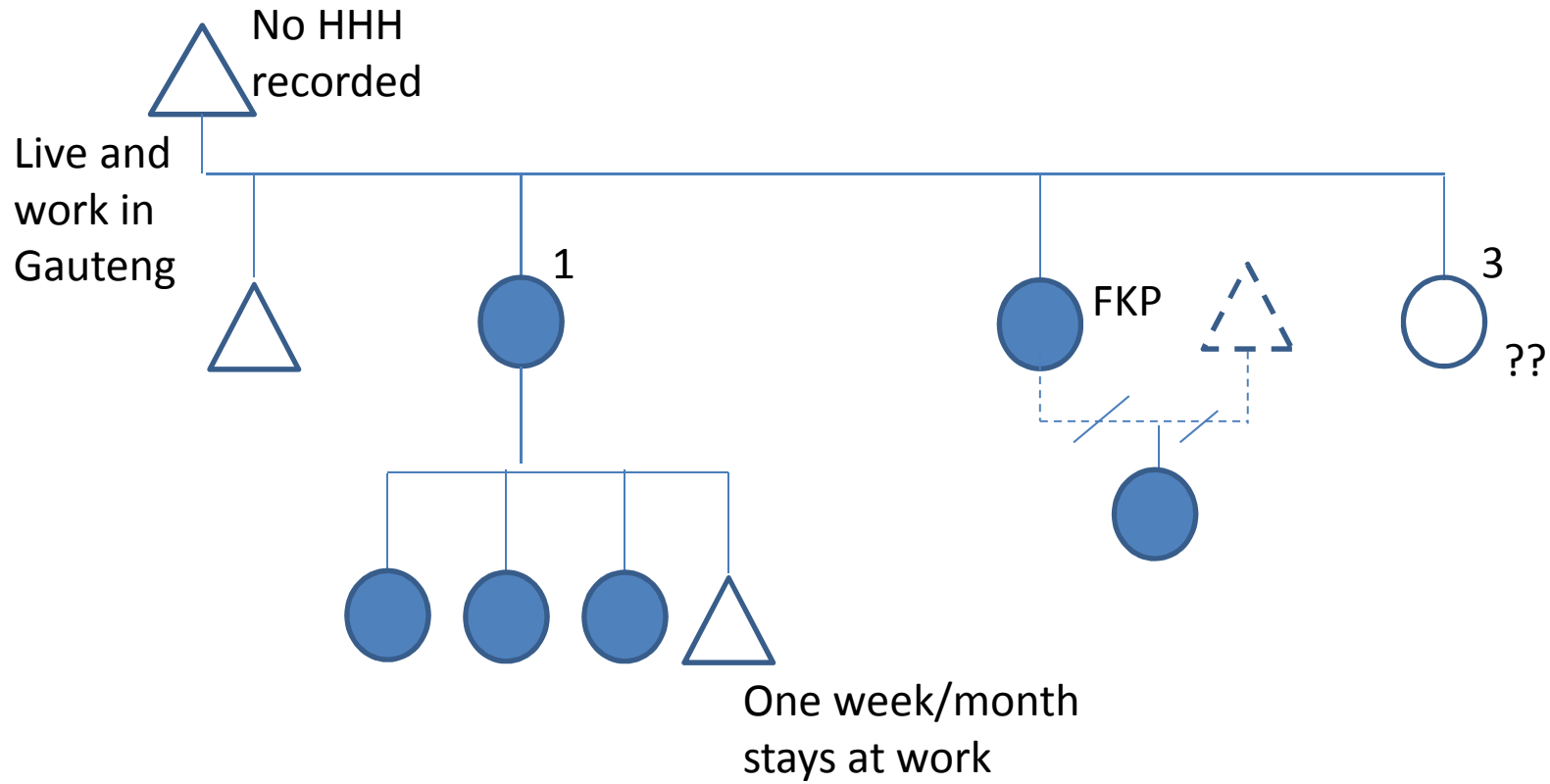
Residential Units



Wealth Creation Unit?
Survey household?



Enumerated Unit



4. Reflections

What lessons can be learnt from this tale of two studies?

- Study 1 had major difficulties in
 1. Taking the data collection unit from design to practice
 2. Dealing with the particular complexities of South African 'households'
- Lack of recognition of the problematic nature of key social and economic concepts
 1. How related to each other
 2. How related to arrangements 'on the ground'
 3. How understood and operationalized by fieldworkers



4. Reflections

What do findings mean for data collected?

- Data quality:
 1. 'Household' membership and structure: possible missing members impacting household size with composition and structure information either incomprehensible or misleading
 - Household head/FKP data possibly not reliable enough to be used in analyses
 2. Financial data: accuracy and completeness dependent on 1 as well as whether right person(s) were interviewed



4. Reflections

What lessons can be learnt with regards to the quantitative household survey research process?

- Collecting data on specific aspects of 'households' (e.g. financial) does not involve input and thought on that aspect alone:
 - Need understanding of interplay between different disciplinary concepts
- Data collection tool set needs to be fit for this purpose:
 - More flexible recording tool for relationship structure
 - Visual overview of unit
 - Promotes understanding



5. Conclusion

Suggestions for moving forward

Survey designers of large-scale household surveys need to:

- Recognise problematic nature of social and economic concepts
- Recognise and understand relationship between social and other dimensions of 'household' unit
- Recognise value of multi-disciplinary inputs to specialist surveys

