

# Qualitative Research

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# INTRODUCTION

**The core material of qualitative research is the fabric of social life**

**What emerges from qualitative research is very often text of one kind or another**

**Qualitative methods elicit narrative and discourse expressed as text, essentially stories.**

***To tell a good story is to spin a fine yarn.***

# INTRODUCTION

## Qualitative analysis can

- answer question about how people make sense of world, address many dimensions of human action and interaction,
- relate these findings to the contexts in which they occur.

## Qualitative researchers

- seek answer to their questions in the real world.
- their purpose is to learn about some aspect of the social world
- generate new understanding that can be used by the social world.

(Rossman and Rallis 1998)

# **WHAT IS QUALITATIVE RESEARCH?**

**A type of scientific research??**

**scientific research consists of an investigation that:**

- Seeks answers to a question**
- Systematically uses a predefined set of procedures to answer the question**
- Collects evidence**
- Produces findings that were not determined in advance**
- Produces findings that are applicable beyond the immediate boundaries of the study**

# **WHAT IS QUALITATIVE RESEARCH?**

**Qualitative research shares these characteristics**

**It seeks to understand a given research problem or topic from the perspectives of the local population**

**Is especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviors, and social contexts of particular populations**

# What is Qualitative Research ?

- Describes & analyses culture & behaviour from the point of view of those being studied (emic perspective).
- Emphasis is on providing a “holistic” understanding of the social setting in which research is conducted
- Relies on a research strategy which is flexible and iterative

# What is Qualitative Research (Contd..)

- Systematic exploration of illness requires in-depth interviewing & probing.
- Rapport building essential for eliciting sensitive information
- Useful method of discovering local language usage by which people communicate

# **LANGUAGE AND LOGIC OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

**Health researchers and practitioners daily confront a myriad of challenging questions**

- How do people make health care related decisions?**
- How are health promotion messages understood by individuals at risk?**
- How a new contraceptive product will be received? How people will react to public health message?**
- How a woman will negotiate the use of condoms during sex with an infected partner?**
- How couples decide how many children to have?**

# **LANGUAGE AND LOGIC OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

**We cannot know for certain how any individual will respond to any of these issues**

**But if we turn to the lessons learned from countless observations and studies of related human behavior, we begin to have some idea of a range of responses**

**Thus we have the beginning of our research questions, and from the set of more general statements and many lessons learned:**

- we develop conceptual and theoretical frameworks**

# **LANGUAGE AND LOGIC OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

**These frameworks provide the logic and the language that guide our research**

**Through a common understanding of how the world works (or doesn't work), theory provides researchers and practitioners with reference points for understanding human behavior in a more general context.**

# What Are Its Uses?

**QR especially useful for :**

- ❖ Exploring a health problem
- ❖ Identifying local perceptions
- ❖ Identifying relevant interventions
- ❖ Investigating feasibility, acceptability & appropriateness of health programmes

# What Are Its Uses ? (Contd..)

- Developing suitable information, education & communication
- Identifying problems in on going interventions & suggesting solutions
- Complementing quantitative data by helping to interpret it
- Designing more valid survey instruments

# Qualitative Research Techniques

**Wide range available :**

- ✓ Individual In-Depth Interviews
- ✓ Focus Group Discussions
- ✓ Participant Observation
- ✓ Systematic Interviewing Techniques

# **PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION**

**A qualitative method with roots in traditional ethnographic research**

**Objective: To help researchers learn the perspectives held by study populations**

- multiple perspectives within any given community -**
- understanding those diverse perspectives and the interplay among them**

# **PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION**

- **Always takes place in community settings**
- **Method is distinctive - researcher approaches participants in their own environment**
- **Researcher:**
  - **tries to learn what life is like for an “insider” while remaining, inevitably, an “outsider”**
  - **makes careful, objective notes about what is observed, recording all accounts and observations as field notes in a field notebook**

# **WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION?**

**Data obtained through participant observation serve as a check against participants' subjective reporting of what they believe and do**

**Also useful for gaining an understanding of the ----  
physical, social, cultural, and economic contexts in  
which study participants live  
the relationships among and between people,  
contexts, ideas, norms, and events  
people's behaviors and activities – what they do,  
how frequently, and with whom**

# **WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION?**

**Enables researchers to develop a familiarity with the cultural milieu that will prove invaluable throughout the project**

**Observing and participating –**

- integral to understanding the breadth and complexities of the human experience**

- an overarching research endeavor for any public health or development project**

# **DISADVANTAGES OF PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION**

## **Time-consuming**

**Traditional ethnographic research: researchers spend at least one year in the field site collecting data through participant observation and other methods**

**Difficult for most applied research studies – need for focused inquiry**

## **Difficulty of documenting the data**

## **Inherently subjective exercise**

**understand the difference between reporting or describing what you observe (more objective) versus interpreting what you see (less objective)**

# **IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW**

**Technique designed to elicit a vivid picture of the participant's perspective on the research topic.**

**During in-depth interviews, the person being interviewed is considered the expert and the interviewer is considered the student**

**The researcher's interviewing techniques are motivated by the desire to learn everything the participant can share about the research topic**

# **IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW**

**Researchers engage with participants by:**

- posing questions in a neutral manner,**
- listening attentively to participants' responses,**
- asking follow-up questions and probes based on those responses**

**Researchers do not:**

- lead participants according to any preconceived notions,**
- encourage participants to provide particular answers by expressing approval or disapproval of what they say**

**Usually conducted face-to-face and involve one / two interviewers and one participant**

# **WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS?**

**Learning about perspectives of individuals, as opposed to group norms of a community, for which focus groups are more appropriate**

**An effective qualitative method for getting people to talk about their personal feelings, opinions and experiences**

# **WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS?**

**An opportunity to gain insight into how people interpret the world by being attentive to:**

- causal explanations participants provide for what they have experienced and believe**
- connections and relationships they see between particular events, phenomena, and beliefs**

**Interviews are also especially appropriate for addressing sensitive topics that people might be reluctant to discuss in a group setting**

# EFFECTIVE PROBES

## Direct questions:

**“What do you mean when you say . . .?”**

**“Why do you think . . .?”**

**“How did this happen?”**

**“How did you feel about . . .?”**

**“What happened then?”**

**“Can you tell me more?”**

**“Can you please elaborate?”**

**“I’m not sure I understand X. . . .Would you explain that to me?”**

**“How did you handle X?”**

**“How did X affect you?”**

**“Can you give me an example of X?”**

# **EFFECTIVE PROBES**

## **Indirect probes:**

**Neutral verbal expressions such as “uh huh,”  
“interesting,” and “I see”**

**Verbal expressions of empathy, such as, “I can  
see why you say that was difficult for you”**

**Mirroring technique, or repeating what the  
participant said, such as, “So you were 19 when you  
first experienced. . .”**

**Culturally appropriate body language or gestures,  
such as nodding in acknowledgment**

# **FOCUS GROUP**

**Qualitative data collection method in which one or two researchers and several participants meet as a group to discuss a given research topic**

**Sessions are usually tape recorded and sometimes videotaped**

**One researcher (the moderator) leads the discussion by asking participants to respond to open-ended questions – that is, questions that require an in depth response rather than a single phrase or simple “yes” or “no” answer**

**A second researcher (the note-taker) takes detailed notes on the discussion**

# **FOCUS GROUP**

## **Strengths:**

**Yield a large amount of information over a relatively short period of time**

**Effective for accessing a broad range of views on a specific topic, as opposed to achieving group consensus**

## **Limitations:**

**Not the best method for acquiring information on highly personal or**

**Socially sensitive topics; one-on-one interviews are better-suited for such topics**

# **WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM FOCUS GROUPS?**

**Especially effective for capturing information about:**

- social norms**
- variety of opinions or views within a population**

**Richness of data emerges from group dynamic and from the diversity of the group**

**Participants influence each other through their presence and their reactions to what other people say**

**Different viewpoints of participants:**

- not everyone will have the same views and experiences (age, gender, education, access to resources, etc.)**

# **WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM FOCUS GROUPS?**

**Can also capture idiosyncratic experiences and views of individuals**

**Within a study, focus groups are typically one method among many that are used to create a complete picture of how a given issue affects a community of people**

**Focus groups contribute to a broad understanding by providing well-grounded data on:**

- social and cultural norms,**
- pervasiveness of these norms within the community**
- people's opinions about their own values**

## **Suggested ground rules for building rapport in focus groups**

**Taking time to establish ground rules at the start of the focus group can save the moderator (and sometimes the entire project staff ) much grief later on**

**All parties will be much better positioned if participants are kind to one another during the focus group and if they respect one another's privacy afterward**

**Laying ground rules is an opportunity to address which behaviors are desirable and which are unacceptable**

# **Suggested ground rules for building rapport in focus groups**

## **Suggested ground rules:**

**Ask participants not to discuss details of the content of the discussion once they leave the focus group site**

**Ask participants to respect other group members by not divulging what any participant says during the discussion or the identity of any individual present once they leave the focus group site**

**Remind them that in the informed consent agreement, they have pledged not to disclose anything concerning their participation in the study with anyone other than the research team**

# **Suggested ground rules for building rapport in focus groups**

**Ask participants to speak one at a time**

**A moderator may prefer**

- to have participants speak in turn according to seating,**
- in the order in which participants indicate having something to say,**
- according to no particular arrangement**

**Speaking one at a time lets everyone hear and react to each contribution, it also makes the note-taker's job easier**

**Ask participants to treat one another with respect**

- not doing anything that could cause another member to feel uncomfortable, e.g. singling out for criticism, name-calling, pejorative comments**

**All participants need to feel free to express their opinions without fear of being attacked by the group**

**A good moderator . . .**

**Shows flexibility**

**Shows sensitivity**

**Has a sense of humor**

**Links ideas together**

**Encourages participation from everyone**

**A good moderator tries not to . . .**

**Dictate the course of discussion**

**Lose control over the conversation**

**Judge comments or be an “expert”**

**Inform or educate *during* the group**

**Lead a question and answer session**

# Case Studies

- Also in-depth interviews, but focused on individual's own actions & explanations.
- Individual “illness episode” very useful type of case study ,wherein ask :
  1. Subject to tell about entire illness episode
  2. Use a checklist of items to fill in entire sequence of treatment seeking

## Case Studies (Contd..)

3. Get subject to tell about actual encounter with health provider, use probes
4. Ask for explanations on cause of illness, reasons for worsening/ improvements
5. Re-visit subject for more details

# Pile Sorting

- ✓ Aims to study relations among items within a domain
- ✓ Useful for discovering perceptions on similarities & differences among items
- ✓ Helps to look at intra-cultural variations in how informants define domains
- ✓ Informants asked to sort cards with names of items written into piles or groups according to their own criteria

## Pile Sort (Contd..)

- ❖ Informants asked to make as many or as few piles as they wish
- ❖ Once pile sort completed, informant asked to explain the different piles

### **Example :**

*“What do all the items in this pile have in common?”*

- ❖ Technique of successive pile sort used to construct taxonomies which illustrates relations among items

# Strengths & Weaknesses of Pile Sort

- Can be done using large number of items
- Is easy to administer
- Cannot be used with non-literate samples unless items are pictures or actual stimuli
- Simple hand analysis possible
- Computerized analysis faster but requires knowledge of appropriate software

# Sampling Techniques

Selection of respondents based on information they can provide

## **Types of sampling strategies :**

- Purposive
- Snowball
- Convenience
- Quota
- Extreme Cases

**Sample Size :** Sample to informational redundancy or sample to saturation

# **SAMPLING IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

**Even if it were possible, it is not necessary to collect data from everyone in a community in order to get valid findings**

**only a sample (that is, a subset) of a population is selected for any given study**

**The study's research objectives and the characteristics of the study population (such as size and diversity) determine which and how many people to select**

**Three most common sampling methods used in qualitative research: purposive sampling, quota sampling, and snowball sampling**

# PURPOSIVE SAMPLING

**One of the most common sampling strategies**

**groups participants according to pre selected criteria relevant to a particular research question (for example, HIV-positive women in a City)**

**Sample sizes, which may or may not be fixed prior to data collection, depend on**

- resources and time available**
- study's objectives**
- theoretical saturation (the point in data collection when new data no longer bring additional insights to the research questions)**

**Most successful when data review and analysis are done in conjunction with data collection**

# QUOTA SAMPLING

**While designing the study, we decide, how many people with which characteristics to include as participants**

**age**

**place of residence**

**gender**

**class**

**profession**

**marital status, etc.**

**Focus on people we think would be most likely to experience, know about, or have insights into the research topic**

**Using recruitment strategies appropriate to**

**location, culture, and study population – find people who fit these criteria, until we meet the prescribed quotas**

# HOW DO PURPOSIVE AND QUOTA SAMPLING DIFFER?

**Similar in that they both seek to identify participants based on selected criteria**

**Quota sampling more specific with respect to:**

- sizes and proportions of sub samples,**
- subgroups chosen to reflect corresponding proportions in the population**

**(gender is a variable of interest in how people experience HIV infection, a quota sample would seek an equal balance of HIV-positive men and HIV-positive women in a given city, assuming a 1:1 gender ratio in the population)**

**Studies employ purposive rather than quota sampling when the number of participants is more of a target than a steadfast requirement – that is, an approximate rather than a strict quota**

# **SNOWBALL SAMPLING**

**snowballing – also known as chain referral sampling**

**a type of purposive sampling**

**participants or informants with whom contact has already been made use their social networks to refer the researcher to other people who could potentially participate in or contribute to the study**

**Often used to find and recruit “hidden populations,” that is, groups not easily accessible to researchers through other sampling strategies**

# **RECRUITMENT IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

- **A recruitment strategy is a project-specific plan for identifying and enrolling people to participate in a research study**
- **The plan should specify criteria for screening potential participants, the number of people to be recruited, the location, and the approach to be used**

# Qualitative Data Analysis

- ❖ Taped interviews transcribed verbatim
- ❖ Translated into English
- ❖ Codes assigned to segments of text
- ❖ Coding framework developed
- ❖ Look for patterns & emerging themes

# QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

**In all social research (Qual + Quant)  
systematically examine data to  
discover patterns, associations  
identify cause and effect relationships**

## **In Quantitative**

- Identify key predictor and outcome variables in advance**
- Contextual var – controlled**
- Data collection and analysis separate phases**
- Statistical**

## **In Qualitative**

- Understand broader context**
- General open ended Qs – to greater precision**
- Data collection and analysis interlinked - iterative**

# QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

## PRINCIPLES

**People differ in their experiences and understandings**

**Social phenomenon cannot be understood outside its own context**

**Theory – guides as well as a result**

**Exceptional cases – insight into problem**

**Understanding behaviour – slowly, nonlinearly**

# QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

## STEPS

- **Reading – develop an intimate relationship content, quality, patterns**
- **Coding – identify emerging themes label text, evolving coding**
- **Displaying data - distinguish nuances of a topic**
- **Developing Hypothesis, questioning & verification**
- **Data Reduction – big picture**
- **Interpretation**
- **Synthesizing findings**

# **REPORTING RESULTS**

**Writing up qual research “converts private problems into public issues, thereby making collective identity and solutions possible” (Richardson, 1990)**

**Introduction**

**Methodology**

**Context**

**Results**

**Discussion**

**Conclusion & Recommendations**

# Triangulation

- ✓ Main research tool used are the researchers themselves
- ✓ Subjective nature of data can open it to criticism
- ✓ A method to enhance quality of data is through triangulation :
  - Data, Researcher, Combining qualitative & quantitative methods

# QUANTITATIVE OR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

**Many quantitative and qualitative researchers today, choose pragmatism over “one-sided paradigm allegiance”**

**Understand similarities and differences, strengths and limitations, and the contribution that each can make to research.**

**“Often a distinct set of strengths and limitations that are markedly different but potentially complementary when combined in a mixed – method research design” (Wolff et al. 1991)**

**Methodological appropriateness – using theory and related methods to make reasoned decisions**

**“appropriate to the purpose of the study, the questions being investigated, and the resources available” (Patton 1990)**

# **COMPARING QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

**Quantitative and qualitative research methods differ primarily in:**

- analytical objectives**
- types of data collection instruments**
- forms of data**
- degree of flexibility built into study design**

# **IS QUANTITATIVE EXPERIENCE APPLICABLE TO QUALITATIVE RESEARCH?**

**Objectives are not mutually exclusive**

**- their approaches to deciphering the world involve distinct research techniques and thus separate skill sets**

**Experience in quantitative methods is not required, but neither is it a disadvantage**

**All qualitative data collectors should have a clear understanding of the differences between qualitative and quantitative research**

**Whatever a researcher's experience in either approach, a general grasp of the premises and objectives motivating each helps develop and improve competence in the qualitative data collection techniques**

## **What are the advantages of qualitative methods for exploratory research?**

- **Use of open-ended questions and probing evoke responses that are:**
  - **meaningful and culturally salient to the participant**
  - **unanticipated by the researcher**
  - **rich and explanatory in nature**
- **Flexibility to probe initial participant responses – ask why or how?**

# SETTING STANDARD FOR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

**At the heart of the debate on research standards is  
the much used, but often misunderstood  
*'concept of subjectivity'***

**For a quantitative scientist, data are facts that must  
be isolated as much as possible from the  
personal or subjective values of the researcher  
*'subjectivity can mean distortion'***

**Notion of a perfectly objective social science is  
*'a widely acknowledged myth'***

**Accuracy of quantitative data often depends on the  
separation of facts from subjective judgment**

# Take Home Message

**Qualitative + Quantitative**

**NOT**

**Qualitative vs Quantitative**

