

Introduction to Qualitative Research

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Objectives

- Identify key differences between quantitative and qualitative research approaches
- Examine how qualitative approaches are useful for health research
- Introduce common qualitative health research data collection techniques

What is qualitative research?

At its most basic, qualitative research refers to “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification...

“It can refer to research about persons’ lives, stories, or behaviors but also about organizational functioning, social movements, or interactional relationships.”

(Strauss and Corbin 1990:17)

“Reaching the parts other methods cannot reach”

- How do qualitative methods differ from quantitative methods?

Key Characteristics of Qualitative Research

- “The investigation of phenomena, typically in an in-depth and holistic fashion, through the collection of rich narrative materials using a flexible research design.” (Moser & Korstjens, 2017)
- “The development of concepts which help us to understand social phenomena in natural (rather than experimental) settings, giving due emphasis to the meanings, experiences, and views of all the participants.” (Pope & Mays, 1995)

Qual/Quant: Different Epistemological Histories

- **Positivist tradition** (*origin of quant*)
 - Discoverable “Truth”
 - Objective reality
 - “Bias-free”
 - Goal: prediction, control, confirmation
- **Constructivist tradition** (*origin of qual*)
 - Reality is socially constructed
 - Multiple interpretations of an event exist
 - Knowledge is linked to context and culture
 - Goal: understanding, discovery, meaning
- These orientations influence decisions about RQs, sampling, & analytic techniques.

Key Characteristics of Qualitative Research

- Focus on meanings & natural contexts
- Goal is to describe, understand, & explain
- Rich, “thick” description of non-numeric data
- Inductive process
- Flexible, iterative, emergent design

Quantitative Research Questions Ask:

How many?

To what extent?

Is X related to Y?

Qualitative Research Questions Ask:

How?

Why?

Under what circumstances?

What is the experience of...?

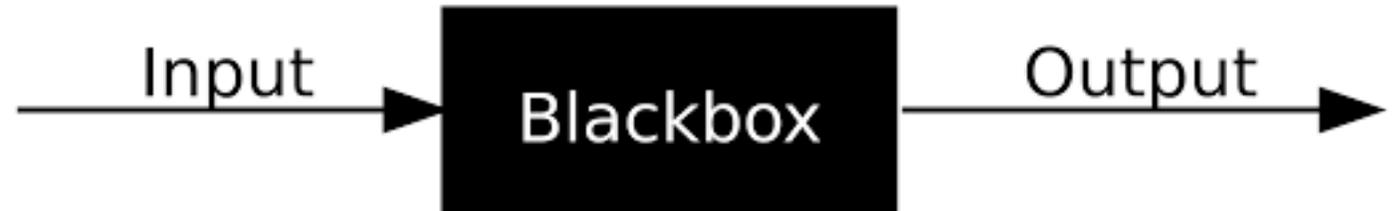
Qualitative Data Collection Methods

- Interviewing
- Focus groups
- Participant observation/ethnography
- Non-participant observation
- Photo elicitation (e.g., photovoice)
- Document analysis

Qualitative Methods in Health Research

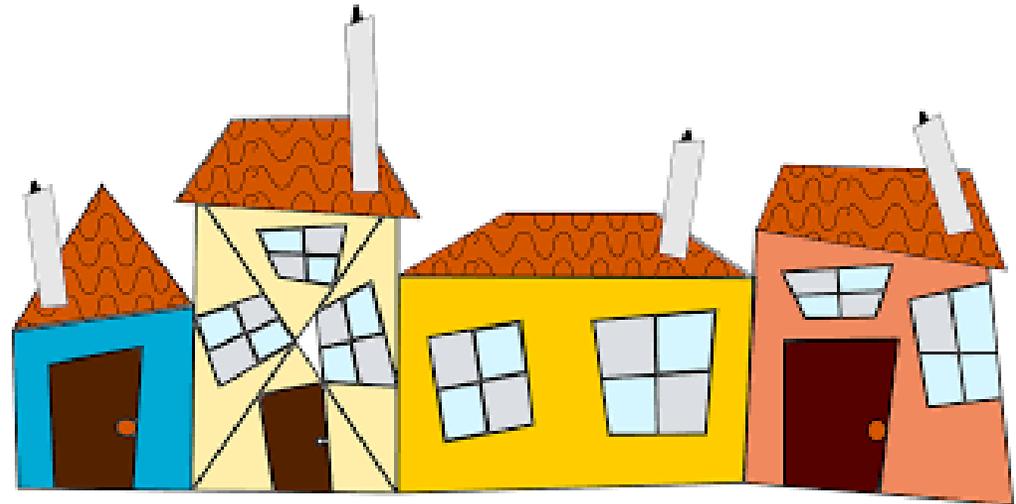
How are qualitative approaches useful for health and health services research?

- “reach the parts other methods cannot reach” (Pope & Mays 1995)
- Provide insight into the “black box” of treatments and interventions (Pope & Mays 1993)



How are qualitative approaches useful for health and health services research?

- may be helpful for addressing the “service gap” between research and practice
- may be used to enhance the relevance and acceptability of interventions for clients and providers



How are qualitative approaches useful for health and health services research?

- “true understanding in medicine cannot be achieved without adding qualitative methods to the research arsenal” (Holman 1993:35)

What types of health-related questions can qualitative approaches help to answer?

- To more fully define a problem or situation
 - Why do so many people drop out of services?
 - Why do people not seek treatment?
 - How do people understand their own health and illness? How is this the same or different from how healthcare providers view health and illness?



What types of health-related questions can qualitative approaches help to answer?

- When presented with a quantitative finding (e.g., unwarranted variation), exploring:
 - Why is this happening?
 - What is going on within those clinical settings?



What types of health-related questions can qualitative approaches help to answer?

- To provide insight into unexpected results from quantitative studies:
 - Why was an intervention less or more effective than expected?



What types of health-related questions can qualitative approaches help to answer?

- To more fully understand the context in which a proposed change (e.g., policy, intervention) will happen:
 - What aspects of the organizational culture could help or hinder the implementation of a system change?
 - What could help facilitate the use of EBPs in a given practice?



What types of health-related questions can qualitative approaches help to answer?

- To engage a community:
 - What problems are most important from the perspective of community members? What really matters?
 - What information about patients' lives are providers not getting?
 - How can members of a community be agents of change?

Qualitative Study Design

Qualitative study design

“The value of empirical evidence can only be properly evaluated by understanding the details of how the research was conducted” (Johnson 1998).

- Study design enables the researcher to assess potential threats to validity/credibility/trustworthiness of the data
- Make intentional choices and also understand the limits of the data (the road not traveled...)



Decisions in Research Design

- Driven principally by the research question
What approach will provide the most 'trustworthy' and 'credible' account?
- Other factors- time, funding- influence design
Understand the choices made and how these limit your data
What's the 'next best' option?

Sampling

- Discovering the scope and nature of the universe to be studied
- What are the components of the system that must be included to provide a valid representation of it?
- Understanding how your *sample* of participants relates to the *sampling frame*

Sample Size

- How many participants do I need?
- No 'gold standards' of sample size for qualitative research
- Saturation: adding new participants does not add new themes to the existing database
 - Somewhat vague, relies on researcher judgment
 - Some literature suggests saturation is typically reached with 12-18 interviews

Strategies to Enhance Credibility

- Using multiple methods in data collection
- Longitudinal research, multiple 'data points'
- Involving multiple researchers in data collection and/or analysis
- Involving members of the community in designing and carrying out the research
- Getting feedback on interpretations

Qualitative Data Collection Techniques

How do we gather qualitative data?

- Interviews
- Focus groups
- Non-participant observation
- Participant observation
- Document analysis
- Photovoice
- Digital ethnography

Qualitative Methods

- Interviewing
- Focus groups
- Participant Observation/ ethnography

Interviews: One Word for Many (Different) Processes

Types of Interviews

- Structured
- Informal
- Unstructured
- In-depth
- Semi-structured



When should I use interviews?

Interviews are well-suited for...

- Gaining insight into first-person perspectives

Interviews are less well-suited for...

- Documenting behaviors and processes



Focus Groups

- Facilitated, group-based inquiry
- 8-12 participants sharing perspectives on a common topic
- Participants build on each others' responses



When should I use focus groups?

Focus groups are well-suited for...

- Gaining insight into first-person perspectives
- Understanding an aspect of *group* process
 - Group format offers an opportunity to gather a range of perspectives, observe consensus (or not!)
 - Group format encourages participants to build on, and respond to, each other's comments



Focus groups are less well-suited for...

- Obtaining in-depth information on a health issue
- Inquiry into sensitive topics

Observational Methods

- Directly observing behaviors and settings
- Naturalistic observation – observing in real-world settings
- Participant observation and Non-participant observation

Naturalistic Observation

- Participant observation
 - Researcher typically becomes immersed in a community or setting over time
 - Technique developed in cultural anthropology and used in ethnographic research
 - Researcher participates in situation being observed while remaining mindful of the research objectives as an observer
- Non-participant observation
 - Researcher observes participants in a setting but without taking an active part in the situation
 - Researcher stays separate from situation being observed

When should I use observational methods?

Observations are well-suited for...

- Documenting behaviors and processes
- Accessing tacit knowledge
- Avoiding socially desirable responses
- Certain populations

Interviews are less well-suited for...

- Gaining insight into first-person perspectives



Thank you!

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- Presentation will be posted to **www.HVCresearch.com**