Qualitative research 1

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Overview of presentation

This presentation will:

• Introduce qualitative research, its advantages, disadvantages and uses

• Discuss the various approaches to qualitative design
Introduction

• Qualitative research is a study done to explain and understand the meaning or experience of a phenomenon or social process and the viewpoints of the affected individuals.

• Investigates opinions, feelings and experiences.

• Understands and describes social phenomena in their natural occurrence—holistic approach.

• Does not test theories but can develop theories.

Mason, 2002
Features of qualitative research

- Exploratory
- Fluid and flexible
- Data-driven
- Context sensitive
- Direct interaction with affected individuals

Mason, 2002
Advantages and disadvantages

**Advantages:**
- Richer information
- Deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study

**Disadvantages:**
- Time consuming
- Expensive
- Less objective
- Findings cannot be generalized

Mason, 2002
Uses of qualitative studies

Exploratory or pilot study:

• Precedes a quantitative study to help refine hypothesis
• Pilot study to examine the feasibility of a program/project implementation
• Designing survey questionnaires
• To improve the reliability, validity and sensibility of new or existing survey instruments in a new population

Green, 2013
Uses of qualitative studies

To explain quantitative data findings:

• Can follow a quantitative research to help provide a deeper understanding of the results. For example, the use of ethnography to explain the social context in which mortality and birth rate data are produced.

• Parallel studies in a mixed qualitative and quantitative design to provide greater understanding of a phenomenon under study.

Green, 2013
Theories grounded in the qualitative research

1. Phenomenology
2. Ethnomethodology - study culture and settings through observations
3. Grounded Theory
4. Symbolic Interactionists
5. Interpretivists - study the feelings, perceptions and understanding of people about an issue
6. Critical approach
7. Feminists

University of Surrey, n.d.
Approaches to qualitative design

- Research question
- Sampling
- Data generation
- Data management, analysis and presentation
- Ethics
Research Question

• Answer questions on ‘how’, ‘what’ or ‘why’ (‘how many’ and ‘how much’ quantitative)
• Should be clear
• Determines data sources and methods

Mason, 2002
Sampling

• Depends on study purpose, population and phenomenon of interest
• Includes categories that will provide data in answer to the research question
• Sample size is usually small but should be large enough to provide sufficient and relevant data
• Depends on available time and resources

Mason, 2002
Sampling

**Purposive sampling**: deviant case sampling; typical case sampling; snowball sampling; political sampling

**Theoretical sampling** (sampling to saturation)
- A type of purposive sampling
- More rigour
- On going until theory—saturation point is reached: there is meaning and understanding of the phenomenon from data already generated and no new information from data

**Convenient sampling**: Less rigour, useful for hard-to-reach groups

Barbour, 2001; Green, 2016
Data sources

- People - individuals or groups
- Organizations and institutions
- Texts - published and unpublished
- Settings, environments
- Objects, artefacts
- Media productions
- Events
- Multiple data sources - more rigour

Mason, 2002
Methods of generating data

1. Individual interviews
2. Focus groups
3. Observations
4. Ethnography
5. Action Research
6. Others: Longitudinal, historical, case studies
7. Triangulation: use of different methods- improves internal validity

University of Surrey, n.d.
Documenting data

**Note taking/transcribing:**
- Researcher may be subjective
- Time consuming (approximately 5 hours for 1 hour of interview)

**Tape recording:**
- More objective
- Better flow of discussion
- More detailed information
- Researcher can refer back to the recording
- Research concentrates better and interacts better

**Tape analysis:** researcher makes note from the recording
- More prone to bias like note taking
Data analysis

• Aims to describe the phenomenon and its meaning in order to establish or provide an in-depth understanding of the problem
• Data is transcribed before analysis and participants’ identifying information is removed
• Approach is usually inductive
• Mostly uses thematic analysis: familiarization with data, identification of codes and themes; data coding; and organizing of codes and themes
• Examples of approaches: thematic content analysis-framework analysis; narrative analysis.

Green, 2013
Thematic content analysis

• Most common
• Shows the essential elements in the participants’ narratives
• Can be used to analyse data generated through interviews, focus groups, observation and documentary analysis

Green, 2013; University of Surrey, n.d
Framework analysis

• A type of thematic content analysis

Steps

1. **Familiarization with data**: Read through the transcripts or listen to tapes and make notes of interesting and relevant information

2. **Develop a coding scheme**: Read the notes and list the different types of information (repetitions, use of specific terminologies- ‘in vivo’, metaphors, similarities or differences); identify codes and themes; then develop the coding scheme

3. **Indexing**: Systematically apply coding to the entire data

4. **Charting**: Look for links among the categories and group them according to themes or by cases

5. **Mapping and interpretation**: Compare and contrast the themes between and within cases

Green, 2013
Grounded theory analysis

- A more systematic approach to analysis
- Goes beyond thematic analysis
- Dictated by emerging data
- Time consuming
- A cyclical process entailing the data generation, analysis, development of provisional coding scheme, further sampling, more analysis, review of emerging theory until a point of saturation
- Uses both inductive and deductive moves back and forth between theory and data
Qualitative data analysis software

• Computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). Examples are: ATLAS.ti, Coding Analysis Toolkit (CAT), Nvivo, QDA Miner, Xsight

Advantages:
• Easier to manage data
• Analysis may be more thorough
• Easy transfer of files as software- team analysis is facilitated and more consistent
• A more transparent analysis

Disadvantages:
• Time to learn how to use the software
• Cost
• Standardized formatting
• Reduced closeness to data
• Grounded theory approach- less suitable to other style of analysis like narratives

Green, 2013
Data presentation

• Based on categories/ themes that emerged from data analysis
• Themes are presented in sections and if necessary, sub-sections
• Quotes from interviews may be included - reliability and validity of quotes
• Possible use of quantitative terminologies
Trustworthiness

- Validity, reliability and generalizability are measures of rigour in quantitative studies.
- Quality and rigour in qualitative research is the ability to demonstrate the methodological, theoretical and practical steps taken to arrive at a conclusion- ‘reflexive methodological accounting’

Mason, 2002
## Improving rigour

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Possible methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>Clear account of procedure&lt;br&gt;Audit trail</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maximize validity</td>
<td>Support interpretations with evidence from the data&lt;br&gt; Analyse deviant cases and disconfirming data&lt;br&gt; Provide sufficient context to enable readers judge interpretation&lt;br&gt; Respondent validation/ member checking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maximize reliability</td>
<td>Comprehensive analysis of entire data set&lt;br&gt; Use more than one analyst/coder&lt;br&gt; Simple frequency count of key themes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comparative</td>
<td>Compare data between and within cases in the data set&lt;br&gt; Compare finding to other studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflexivity</td>
<td>Account for researcher’s role in the study: methodological and theoretical openness and consciousness of research environment and the broader social context</td>
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Generalizability

- Qualitative studies are not statistically generalizable
- Conceptual generalizability: The similarities between concepts that are associated with specific problems
- Transferability – adequate description of the study setting and good theoretical analysis

Green, 2013
Ethics

- Protects individuals, communities, environment and researchers
- For research funding
- Necessary for credibility of study
- Includes the ethical principles of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice

Green, 2013
Ethical dilemmas

• Informed consent: not always possible—chanced interviews, observations, gatekeepers and hard-to-reach groups

• Confidentiality and anonymity may not be absolute: focus groups, participatory research, moral and legal rights

• Avoiding harm: interview process may cause unintended emotional stress

• Researchers: integrity, physical or psychological trauma to researchers

Green, 2013
References


• University of Surrey. Introduction to Research: Unit 6 Qualitative Research [Internet], no date. Available from: http://libweb.surrey.ac.uk/library/skills/Introduction%20to%20Qualitative%20Research%20and%20Managing%20Information%20Leicester/page_52.htm
Thank you!