
Demystifying Nursing Research

An Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods

Julie G. Donalek
Sandie Soldwisch

Qualitative research is the organized, systematic exploration of some portion of human experience. It is not concerned with the statistical interpretation of data but rather with the discovery of common emergent themes. A qualitative study can be as simple as an open-ended questionnaire exploring responses to a new clinic program or as complex as a decade-long study of the interactions of a family living with a HIV positive member. Data are most often interviews but may also include observation, music, art, photos, videos, crafts, tools, newspapers, or any other artifact that expands human understanding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Purpose and Forms of Qualitative Research

The purpose of qualitative research is always to gain understanding at the individual or group level. Qualitative research may be done when little is known about a phenomenon. A qualitative study might first identify the values, customs, responses, or rituals of importance to a patient group. A subsequent quantitative study could then assess the frequency or intensity or rate the priority placed on these factors. Alternately, a single study might incor-

porate both quantitative and qualitative components. As an example, a methodologically combined study might explore what services a mentally ill individual in the community uses, how often the services are used (both quantitative questions), and what it is like to use these services (a qualitative question). Frequently, however, qualitative studies are intended to stand alone, to allow the reader to share in the world of research participants.

Contrasting Views

Very real differences separate qualitative and quantitative approaches. Quantitative research is deductive. It presupposes a constant, stable, external reality that is measurable and follows discernible rules of science. Its purpose is to measure some portion of that fixed reality. In contrast, qualitative research is inductive, moving from the perspective of the individual or group to possible wider themes. Qualitative researchers believe that reality is that to which people pay attention and value. If an individual or group is not thinking about something or doesn't value it, then, at that moment, it has little or no reality, however physically real the object, event, or condition may be. Individuals focus on that which has personal importance (Streubert & Carpenter, 1995).

Quantitative research assumes cause and effect while qualitative research assumes that human motivations are extraordinarily complex. Quantitative research involves elaborate measures to distance the researcher from "subject" in order to avoid influence on research outcomes. An ideal quantitative experiment takes place in a laboratory, eliminating environment as a potential intervening variable that could influence data. In contrast, the qualitative researcher sees data as meaningless without situating that data in its environment and culture (Streubert & Carpenter, 1995). The qualitative researcher recognizes that it is essential to establish and maintain a close relationship with research "participants" or "co-investigators" in order to create the comfort necessary to explore what can sometimes be sensitive content (Munhall, 2001).

While the quantitative researcher carefully selects research subjects so that the sample is ran-

Julie G. Donalek, DNSc, RN, APRN,BC, is an Assistant Professor, DePaul University Department of Nursing, Chicago, IL.

Sandie Soldwisch, PhD, RN, APRN,BC, is a Professor, North Park University School of Nursing, Chicago, IL.

Note: This article is the first in a series presenting the basics of qualitative research for nurses. It is meant to complement the series on quantitative methods that has appeared in this journal. This first article will introduce the method, focus on the perspective that underlies all qualitative research, and contrast this perspective with underlying quantitative methods. Nurses may find a special attraction to qualitative research. Nurses focus on the individual, the family, and the community as they experience health and illness. Nurses believe in respecting differences, in recognizing the role of culture in the interpretation of life events, and in understanding how history, gender, and socioeconomic status mold the human life world. These beliefs underlie the practice of qualitative research as well.

continued on page 356

Demystifying Research

continued from page 354

domly selected and therefore representative of a larger population (has external validity), the qualitative researcher seeks participants because of their knowledge of and ability to describe the phenomenon or some part of the phenomenon under study. Again, while the quantitative researcher hopes to achieve statistical significance, the qualitative researcher hopes to achieve a full understanding. Multiple participants may be interviewed until the same themes appear repeatedly. The data are then said to have achieved "saturation," a sense that full understanding has been reached (Streubert & Carpenter, 1995).

Conclusion

In this article, beginning nurse-researchers have been introduced to an alternative view of the research process. Qualitative methods allow nurses to explore worlds of experience and meaning and find answers to many questions of special importance to the practice of our profession. Heightened awareness yields opportunities to improve health care experiences, and by extension, associated outcomes. In subsequent articles, the basic design common to all qualitative studies will be described, some of the better known qualitative methods will be compared and contrasted, the interview as the most commonly used qualitative technique will be explored, the details of data analysis and presentation in qualitative studies will be discussed, and finally, the uses and future of qualitative research in nursing will be examined. ■

References

- Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (2000). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative methods. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative methods* (2nd.ed.) (pp. 1-28). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Munhall, P.L. (2001). Language and nursing research. In P.L. Munhall (Ed.), *Nursing research: A qualitative perspective* (3rd ed.) (pp. 3-35). Sudbury, MA: Jones & Bartlett.
- Streubert, H.J., & Carpenter, D.R. (1995). *Qualitative research in nursing: Advancing the humanistic imperative*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott.

Qualitative research is research that uses a natural background, to interpret the phenomena that occur and carried out by involving various methods that exist [9]. Meanwhile, Sugiyono (2012) explains the meaning qualitative research as a research method based on a philosophy postpositivism is used to examine the condition of natural objects, where the researcher is as a key instrument, data collection techniques with. This study aims to see the implementation of the m-library application and see the extent of the evaluation of the application. The m-library application is used for the process of borrowing books, viewing catalogs, and reading book online. The method used in this... Using qualitative methods is an art form which requires lots of practice! When I teach Qualitative Methods as part of American University's online courses in the MS in Measurement and Evaluation, I encourage my students to carry out assignments where they practice qualitative methods in research and evaluation. Students in my classes carry out participant observation, interviews, and focus groups under my guidance. I stress three points about program evaluation research to my online students. First, we need to remember that all evaluations need to be systematic and logical, and we should consider what method would best answer our evaluation questions, be it qualitative or quantitative. Write research questions for qualitative research. Design and conduct interviews. Collect observational data. Know the basics for analyzing qualitative research. Requirements. You do not need any special materials or knowledge for this course. Description. You will also be introduced to basic data analysis techniques and think about where you would like to publish and present your research. This course is perfect for anyone interested in conducting qualitative research but isn't sure how to get started. At the end of this course, you will have gained knowledge about the primary tools used in qualitative research and how to use them. You will be ready to go forth and conduct your own research. Who this course is for: Anyone with interest but no background in qualitative research. Acknowledgments Introduction Case Study Module 1 " Qualitative Research Methods Overview. Introduction to Qualitative Research Comparing Quantitative and Qualitative Research Sampling in Qualitative Research Recruitment in Qualitative Research Ethical Guidelines in Qualitative Research Suggested Readings Module 2 " Participant Observation Overview of Participant Observation Ethical Guidelines Logistics of Participant Observation How to Be an Effective Participant Observer Tips for Taking Field Notes Suggested Readings Case Study Samples Participant Observation Steps Module 3 " In-Depth Intervi...