

Introduction to Qualitative Research



ScWk 240 – Week 9 Slides

What is Qualitative Research?

- **Being in the field**
- **Anthropology, journalism**
- **Social context, comprehensiveness, rich texture of life**
- **Patterns, themes, common categories**

In Qualitative Research:

- We do not test hypothesis or previous theories.
- We may try to develop new theories based on what happens in specific situations.
- We do not try to generalize our findings.
- We rely on data collected from interviews, observations, and content analysis of newspapers, books, videos, case records, and other already developed documents.
- We do not know or try to develop response categories prior to conducting the study.

Qualitative Research is Sometimes called “Naturalistic Inquiry”



Meaning that the researcher just reports on what's there – and does not try to manipulate or intervene in any way. Sometimes naturalistic inquiry is compared to newspaper reporting.

Comparing Quantitative to Qualitative

QUANTITATIVE	QUALITATIVE
▪ Theory/hypothesis testing	▪ Theory/hypotheses generating
▪ Explanation	▪ Understanding
▪ Quantification and statistics (what/how much?)	▪ Description (in what context?)
▪ Deductive	▪ Inductive
▪ Focus on Objective Data	▪ Focus on Observation

One way to think about the difference between Deductive and Inductive methods is to think about Detectives.



Detectives apply general theories to revolve problems (a quantitative approach). Qualitative researchers examine what happens in specific situations and try to develop new theories based on that situation.

Topics OK for Qualitative Research

- Exploratory research questions
- Topics and peoples in natural settings
- Data: written or spoken words and observations

Qualitative Research Tends To:

- Answer research questions rather than test a hypothesis.
- Seldom look at the effectiveness of an intervention.
- Examine the perceptions, actions, and feelings of participants.
- Obtained detailed information from interviews, content analysis, or observations.

Types of Qualitative Research

- Grounded theory
- Ethnography
- Phenomenology
- Field research

Grounded Theory

- Grounded theory refers to an **inductive** process of generating theory from data. This is considered ground-up or **bottom-up** processing.
- Grounded theorists argue that theory generated from observations of the empirical world may be more valid and useful than theories generated from deductive inquiries.
- Grounded theorists criticize deductive reasoning since it relies upon a priori assumptions about the world.
- However, grounded theory incorporates deductive reasoning when using **constant comparisons**.
- In doing this, researchers detect **patterns** in their observations and then create working hypotheses that directs the progression of the inquiry.

Ethnography

- Ethnography emphasizes the observation of details of everyday life as they **naturally unfold** in the real world. This is sometimes called naturalistic research.
- Ethnography is a method of describing a culture or society. This is primarily used in **anthropological** research.

Phenomenology

- Phenomenology is a school of thought that emphasizes a focus on people's **subjective experiences and interpretations** of the world.
- Phenomenological theorists argue that objectivity is virtually impossible to ascertain, so to compensate, one must view all research from the perspective of the researcher.
- Phenomenologists attempt to understand those whom they observe from the **subjects' perspective**.
- This outlook is especially pertinent in social work research where **empathy and perspective** become the keys to success.

Field Research

- Field research is a general term that refers to a group of methodologies used by researchers in making qualitative inquiries.
- The field researcher goes directly to the social phenomenon under study and observes it as completely as possible.
- The **natural environment** is the priority of the field researcher. There are no implemented controls or experimental conditions to speak of.
- Such methodologies are especially useful in observing social phenomena **over time**.

Methods for Data Collection

- **Interview**

- **Individual**

- (1) informal**

- conversational**

- (2) interview guide**

- **Group: focus group**

Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths

- **Depth of understanding**
- **Flexibility**

Weaknesses

- **Subjectivity**
- **Suggestive, not definitive**
- **Limited generalizability**
- ❖ *Mixed methodology is possible*



A View for Qualitative Analysis