

INTRODUCTION TO QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: APPROACHES, PARADIGMS & METHODS



Dr M N. Munakampe

University of Zambia, School of Public Health

Acknowledgements: Joseph Zulu, Oliver Mweemba & Lynne Lohfeld, MS, McMaster University

BRAINSTORMING

- What is research?
- What is qualitative research?
- Why do qualitative research in public health?



WHAT IS RESEARCH?

RE·SEARCH: NOUN: 1. a detailed study of a subject, especially in order to discover (new) information or reach a (new) understanding.

Cambridge Dictionaries Online,
© Cambridge University Press 2003.



WHAT IS QUALITATIVE RESEARCH?

“Involves exploratory research questions, an orientation to social context, and the meanings attached by participants to event and their lives...”

Schutt 2012



WHY DO QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN PUBLIC HEALTH?

"Not everything that can be counted counts,
and not everything that counts can be counted"

Albert Einstein



WHY QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN PUBLIC HEALTH?

Public health is complex

- behavioral, social & cultural dimensions shape emerging domestic & international health problems

Qualitative research → understand:

- behaviors,
- attitudes
- perceptions, &
- determinants of health in ways quantitative studies cannot



The main research instrument

- The researcher is the main research instrument:
- the researchers ability to create mutually respectful and trusting relations with informants and communities/ organisations
- consider carefully our position (engaged, neutral) in the field, among different interest, political divides, competition, marginalization, taboo, etc



Central concepts

Cultural relativism:

relativism

/ˈrɛlətɪvɪz(ə)m/ 

noun

the doctrine that knowledge, truth, and morality exist in relation to culture, society, or historical context, and are not absolute.

- Cultures (systems of belief, values and norms) are more or less coherent and rational within their own context
- Understandings of health, illness and treatment are part of such cultural systems
- Failure to recognise this may lead to failure in addressing global health challenges.



Reflexivity

- Critical self-awareness - examination of the researcher's own position versus study population & how this may influence the information gained
- Outline possible bias and how these affect the information
- Consider and explain the nature of relations with informants:
 - what positions, conditions and interaction influenced the insight gained



QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH



OVERVIEW OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN QUALITATIVE & QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

| | Quantitative | Qualitative |
|------------------------------|--|--|
| General framework | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to test hypotheses • follows strict protocol, unmodified • uses structured methods | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to explore, describe phenomena • uses flexible, evolving design • uses semi-structured methods |
| Analytical objectives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to quantify variation • to identify causal relationships • to predict & control phenomena • to test hypotheses • to generalize to population | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to describe variation • to identify patterns • to describe & explain relationships and individual experiences, group norms |
| Question format | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close-ended (if survey) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open ended |



WHEN TO USE QUALITATIVE METHODS

- Qualitative methods can highlight questions like: "What is....?" "What means...?" "How does....happen?"
- The aim is understanding more than explaining
- Qualitative inquiry in fields where knowledge is limited, problems are complex, and where we don't know the categories for answers



QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACHES



RESEARCH APPROACHES (DESIGNS)

| Quantitative | Qualitative |
|--|---|
| Experimental designs Non-experimental design such as surveys | Phenomenology Ethnography Grounded theory Case study (Creswell, 2007) |



ETHNOGRAPHY

- Studies of a culture group in a natural setting
- Observational, conversational & interview data
- Flexible research process evolving contextually in response to the lived realities encountered in the field setting



ETHNOGRAPHY

- Usually focuses a single setting or group, of relatively small scale
- Analysis of data involves
 - interpretation of meanings of human actions;
 - mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations;
 - with quantification of data playing a subordinate role



GROUNDED THEORY

- Attempt to derive general and abstract theory of a process, action or interaction grounded in the views of the participants
- This process involves using multiple stages of data collection and the refinement or categories of information
- Used when there is no theory or when existing theories are inadequate



CASE STUDY

- In-depth exploration of a programme, activity, event, process, group of people, etc.
- Case is bounded by time or place
- Can be an event, program, activity, one or more than one individual



PHENOMENOLOGY

- Identifying the "essence" of human experience concerning a phenomenon, as described by the **participants** in a study

or

- Understanding "lived experience"
- Experiences are described by the participants, typically in in depth interviews



End

