

Using qualitative research to explore women's responses

Towards meaningful assistance - how evidence from qualitative studies can help to meet survivors needs



Possible questions

- Why do survivors of SV not access mental health services?
- What are the needs for support identified by victim/survivors?
- What meanings do survivors ascribe to their experiences of SV?

Questions

- Why do victims delay disclosing SV to formal services including health, criminal justice, victim services?
- What responses to disclosure do victims find most helpful versus most unhelpful from informal sources of support and formal sources of support?

What do these questions have in common?

What do they tell us about qualitative research?

- Research investigating/privileging the perspectives of those being studied
- Gives an understanding of how informants see and structure their world and relies on the words they use to describe it
- Helps us see the world from their perspective so we can learn **WHY** they act as they do and **WHY** and **HOW** the ways they act make sense to them

Application of methods

Qualitative methods can be used to:

- explore a question/ topic in great depth (as in long term ethnographic fieldwork)
- or give a very rapid understanding e.g. for questionnaire design
- Provide a flexible investigative strategy

Approaches to sampling and interviewing

Usually the precise number of people to be interviewed and who they are and how they will be selected are not defined beforehand

- But sampling is usually done to provide the best fit to examine a theoretical issue (theoretical sampling) and/or to ensure participants will be sources of ‘information rich’ material on a topic
- Exactly what will be asked in an interview is not defined- an iterative process that develops over study
- There should be a broad research question and a scope of inquiry

A set of methods used to capture complexity

Qualitative research specifically acknowledges that we live in a complex world and that the ‘truth’ may be elusive

- Captures different representations of truth
- Enables us to acknowledge that people may not know the answer to something you want to explore
- As a researcher you can gather data, reflect and write on it and in qualitative research you take back your transcripts/interviews/ reflections to participants for ‘member checking’
- Gives more control to participants over the research

Qualitative vs quantitative research

- Qualitative research is not an alternative to quantitative research
- Quantitative research has an Etic- outsider perspective- relies on concepts and categories that have meaning for the researcher who is outside the study frame of reference and is the sole judge of the validity of the data
- Quantitative research typically has testable hypotheses that can provide clear cut, definitive answers to questions

Quantitative research

- Its knowledge and scientific claims rests largely on the following:
- Its constructs are precise, logical, replicable and falsifiable, independent of the observer
- The phenomena/constructs to be researched are already clearly named and can therefore be counted/quantified and analysed statistically

Qualitative research

- Relies on an Emic- insider perspective
- It is concerned with exploring the perspectives of informants/insiders to a particular social world or set of experiences
- It explores HOW, WHEN, and WHY questions that are meaningful to the participants
- For example, it might examine participants own views on the significant constraints on their health seeking behaviour
- Seeks to obtain intuitive, empathic understandings

Meanings and understandings of research participants

- These are captured through a set of methods that rely on:
- Verbal descriptions- own words provide access to phenomenological world of participants
- Photos/pictures/maps
- Observations recorded as notes – reflection on what has been said/ reflection on what you as a researcher bring to the questions you are investigating

If all I have is a hammer, all I will see are nails

- The decision to use quantitative or qualitative methods or both
- Must be based on the nature of the research questions being asked
- Rigour in research depends on goodness of fit between research questions and methods
- Research questions are equally important in qualitative as they are in quantitative research

Research process

- Research questions in qualitative research are critical
- They shape design of study, scope of inquiry, provide categories for initial analysis and shape final account
- Question/s should not be too broad
- Don't sacrifice depth to breadth
- Remember you have to analyse large quantities of data

Role of the protocol

- *For the researcher:*
- Ensure project is a product of in-depth thinking about the topic, that research question is original, and that methods, timetable and budget are planned
- *For others:*
- To judge the worth of and risk associated with the study
- So stakeholders can see what is planned and give advice to maximise the worth of the study

Structure of protocol

- You will notice the structure of the protocol is broadly the same as for a quantitative project
- Introduction
- Literature review
- Methods
- Timetable
- Budget
- References

Research process contd

- Conduct a critical review of the literature
- What is already known?
- What are the gaps? Provide rationale for your study- why is it important?
- What methodological improvements are needed on previous research?
 - Lit review: Must be multi-disciplinary
 - Must include all health sciences
 - Must include social science literature

Methods section

- Methods section- Describe methods you will use- number and type of interviews. Taping? Notes?
- Recruiting methods: Include and justify study location, participants and why they have been chosen.
- Who will do the interviews?
- Scope of inquiry
- Ethics
- Data analysis

Sample size

- Qualitative research does not provide a fixed number of participants in describing its sample
- The objective is to gain information and insights from ‘information rich’ cases- purposive sampling
- Keep recruiting/interviewing until you reach saturation- are not hearing anything significantly new or different from what you have heard already
- Iteration- check out new aspects of the accounts that emerge in subsequent interviews
- Aim for quality not quantity. You are important here

Validity and reliability

- Don't aim to seek the “truth” but, data generated are usually more valid than those of surveys
- all data are generated in context so research process becomes part of the social phenomena under study
- informants provide accounts and versions rather than “telling it as it is”

Public vs private accounts

- Informants initially provide ‘public accounts’, the interview can be seen as a performance generating a type of ‘fiction’ (or perhaps ‘faction’)
- ‘Private accounts’ are accessed through re-interviewing, prolonged acquaintance, observation leading to pertinent questioning or being thought of as from the same ‘community’ as the informant
- Informants may move between private and public accounts in one interview - questioning style is crucial

Triangulation

- Validate inferences drawn from one data source by comparison with 2 + others
- Data sources: another interview, another informant, a document, observation etc..
- Different kinds of data are examined to confirm or refute a conclusion based on the assumption that they have different kinds of error built in and they counteract each other
- All data analysis involves some degree of selection, interpretation, inference and use the researcher's common-sense knowledge

Member checking- informant validation

- It is good practice to present your findings back to your informants also their transcripts for adding and amending anything
- It would be worrying if they couldn't relate to anything you had written
- BUT their reactions should not be taken as direct validation or refutation of your conclusions
- Reactions will reflect their interests and interpretations, they have not the same theoretical background as you and have not each heard the other interviews

Rapid appraisal

- Approach to study design not data collection method
- data collection is quick and focused around one question of interest
- several researchers work together using different methods
- aim to get as many different perspectives as possible
- emphasise interviews with ‘experts’

Some suggestions re sample size

- PhD - 70/100 interviews
- Master's thesis - 35 interviews
- Focused policy study - 25 interviews
- Questionnaire design - 5 interviews

Qualitative research: approaches

- Interviews with individual informants
- Focus groups
- Narrative group interviews
- Participatory methods (individual or group)
- Participant observation

Individual interviews

- **Unstructured**

Conversational. Questions and topics not decided in advance.

- **Semi-structured (or minimally structured)**

Interview guide or aide memoire is used.

Topics specified but sequence and wording is flexible.

Individual interviews

- **Structured**

exact wording and sequence of questions specified. Wording is open-ended

e.g. Can you tell me what happened and why you decided not to disclose to your family that you had been raped?

Strengths

Weaknesses

Unstructured

Good for new areas
Discussion is led by the situation

Takes longer. Difficult to ensure that you learn everything you want.
Different information from different people
Data handling hardest

Semi-structured

More systematic
Data easier to organise
Still flexible and conversational

Interviews with different informants can look quite different.

Structured (open-ended)

Easiest to analyse
Best is very good understanding of topic or depth not needed
Can use multiple interviewers

Emphasis depends on interests of interviewee.
Standardised wording may seriously limit answers
Recording often incomplete as writing tedious

Why are focus group difficult?

- Group dynamics!
- Groups easily dominated by 1 or 2 people
- Hard to get everyone contributing
- Probing is very difficult so complex idea cannot be explored
- Group dynamics must be preserved which means all must contribute a little often
- Therefore, data is generally very low quality

Problem with Focus Groups

- People are reluctant to express contrary opinions - 'group norming'
- reluctance to discuss sensitive issues in a group
- focus groups always generate 'public accounts' i.e. present the world in a face saving way
- these can be particularly convincing as so many people seem to agree with them
- you never know what is not discussed!
- An unskilled moderator can greatly influence the way questions are answered

Beware of numbers game

- Remember - qualitative research should focus on QUALITY not QUANTITY!
- 70 people involved in focus groups is not akin to 70 randomly selected people completing a questionnaire because qualitative research is not directly generalisable

Narrative group interview

Type of minimally structured group interview

- Participants describe past experiences as a ‘story’
“I would like to hear the story of your last visit to the Police Station and hear about everything that happened there”
- Narrative group interviews:
 - Set up like focus groups with a facilitator
 - Much easier to control

Narrative group interviews

- Each person gets to give an account in turn, ask a volunteer to start
- Storytellers are not interrupted but discussion is allowed at the end
- Discussion is not terribly important - the aim is to record stories
- Easy to tape

Pros and cons

Narrative group interviews:

- Can generate very high quality data
- The interpretation is done later
- It is useful to have other information to help you interpret especially observations and in-depth interviews
- There may still be problems of group norming - its important to emphasise that you need the accounts of e.g. people who had good and bad experiences

Participatory methods

- Can be used to explore a narrow part of a research question in more depth or give a greater sense of participation in research
- Can be individual or group
- Techniques include: Mapping, Three pile sorting, Drama
- What is shown is always discussed and usually this is the most valuable part of the method and must be recorded

Participant observation

Approach to collecting data about a social group - cornerstone of traditional anthropology

- Principle is learning about a group through living their lives – think as they live!
- Data collection through writing field notes like a diary each day

Participant observation

- Allows a deep understanding of cultural meanings and the social structure of the group being studied
- Allows development of very complex understandings
- Very time consuming - classical anthropologists live 1+ years in the field

Putting qualitative methods together

- All substantial qualitative projects should use multiple methods
- As soon as you become interested in a topic open a diary and start recording things of interest in your daily life
- This will assist you in your in-depth interviews
- Golden rule: in qualitative research **EVERYTHING is DATA !!!!**