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# Qualitative Research



## Contributors

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# Characteristics



- Subjective: Captures views, motivations, and experiences of participants
- Provides meaning to data with words
- Can be used to explain survey results
- Can be used to develop surveys or materials or interventions for patients
- Can be used to develop new hypotheses

# Relationship to Quantitative Research



- Qualitative research is dismissed by many as “soft research”
- Totally opposite of quantitative research in terms of trying to get equally distributed groups
- Want to get experts on certain topics
- Want to get views of like people to see if can identify themes
- Totally opposite in terms of trying to control for extraneous variables

# Types of Designs



- Focus groups
- Interviews
- Documentation: e.g., charts, letters, diaries
- Observation
- Case study

# Focus Groups



- Bring together groups of people of a certain type to identify their views, wants, needs, etc.
- Have its roots in advertising
- Groups are usually segregated by age, gender, race, or perhaps other attributes

# Recruiting Focus Group Subjects (1)



- Go to where they (potential subjects) hang out
- Use an advertising agency to recruit potential subjects
- Have potential subjects fill out a focus group screener, including questions of
  - Demographic questions
  - A few questions of interest to our topic

## Recruiting Focus Group Subjects (2)



- Look over the screener and decide who we want to invite to the group
- Call potential subjects and invite them
- Invite a few extras just in case
  - If too many, we can pay them and send them home
- Give them a general idea about what you are going to talk about
- But not a lot
- As we are going for spontaneous “from the heart” responses



# Focus Group Procedures



- Each subject may be paid for \$75 or higher for coming
- Best to arrange all of our groups on 1 day to avoid a historical effect
- 6-10 participants per group
- Each group may last for about 1½ hours
- Respondents are asked to come early to eat and drink
  - Get our participants socializing and talking to each other

# Focus Group Facility



- A room with a large table
- Generally the room has a 2-way mirror
- Observers (can be the researchers) may watch from behind the glass
- If the researchers do not have funding for renting a facility with a 2-way mirror, the researchers can use a large room and have observers present in the room
- Notes (data) are taken by the observers
- Sessions will usually be taped and transcribed later (data)

# Focus Group Leader or Moderator



- Is best to have a disinterested moderator to avoid bias
- Is best to have a moderator similar to group: e.g., a Hispanic woman for group of Hispanic women
- The moderator should be trained and able to get people talking

# Focus Group Moderator Guide



- Is an outline for the moderator to follow
- Must use the same guide for every group so all groups are approached in the same manner
- Starts out explaining the “rules of the game”
  - Today we are going to talk about .....
- Have open ended questions
- Has prompts

# Sample Questions



- Tell me about your end-of-life preferences
- Prompt
  - Can you say a bit more about that
  - Why do you feel that way?

# Interview Techniques



- Use open ended questions
- Use careful listening
- Do not lead respondents

# Terminating The Group



- Generally have a debriefing time
- Let participants ask any questions they may have
- Often, participants may want to meet the observers, if the observers are behind the glass
- Thank participants and pay them CASH in an envelope

# Focus Group Data Analysis (1)



- Can be a nightmare
  - Many focus group studies not published for this reason
- Take the transcripts from each group
- Have two disinterested persons read the transcripts and identify themes, if any
- Then, have the disinterested persons (aforementioned) come together along with the researchers to identify or verify the developed themes



## Focus Group Data Analysis (2)



- Very sophisticated programs now that you can read in the transcripts
- Identify different “nodes”
- You can ask the program to tell you how many times a certain word was mentioned
- All these are attempts to “quantify” the data

## Focus Group Data Analysis (3)



- Give participants specific scenarios and ask the group if they can come to an agreement
  - For example: If you had 6 months to live, would you rather live a few days longer and stay in the ICU or go home and live a few days shorter?
- This way, the researchers can say how each group responded to each of the predetermined scenarios without fancy data analysis programs

# Another trick



- Put all important concepts on cards
  - e.g., end-of-life preferences
- During the group, have the observers add to the stack of cards any new concepts that the group may mention
- At the end of the group, have the participants do a “card sort” exercise
  - Place 4 hats in the front of the room
  - The moderator yells each concept out and asks the group to quickly put the concept in the very important, important, neutral, or not important hat
- This way, we will have very important and important concepts “quantified” for each group

# Last Thoughts on Focus Groups



- Is best to do a few groups for each segmented category
  - Could have a weird group or a heckler or a dominant person that intimidates the group
- Large studies do groups in different regions of the country

# Interviews



- Used interviews if the topic is too sensitive to discuss in a group
- Used to gain unique insights of individuals
- Used if respondents are so dissimilar or live too far away to assemble a group
- Similar ideas for interviewing as in focus groups

# An Interview Example



- A study tested the differences between a new smoking intervention and a traditional smoking secession program
- All smokers that were assigned to the new intervention group were interviewed after the study to see....
  - What they liked and disliked about the intervention

# Documentation (1)



- Example: Go through patient charts and read nurses notes
  - To identify common themes
- Example: Go through nursing diaries
  - To identify what it was like to be a nurse in the 1800's

## Documentation (2)



- The same idea as in the focus group analysis
- Have two independent reviewers read the document and identify themes
- Then, the independent reviewers meet together with the research team
- Goal: Reach a consensus on the themes



# Observation



- Come from anthropology
  - Example: We observe family members in the waiting room of an intensive care unit
- We take notes on the types of concerns family members are expressing
- We identify common themes from our notes

# Case Study



- Comes from medicine
- Study individual cases to identify a common theme
- Example: When AIDS first presented itself, it was not a known disease and was initially classified as cancer

# Mixed Methods (1)



- Bring together both qualitative and quantitative data
- Use both to explain a phenomenon
- Example: The researchers may use the quantitative data from the RCT and the qualitative data from the interviews

## Mixed Methods (2)



- **Example:**
  - Give the focus group participants in the end-of-life group a survey to take home and complete
  - Then, the researchers can compare the focus group data and survey data to see if they match
  - Allows the researchers to get data from respondents who were quiet during group or data that people did not feel comfortable about talking about in group

# Triangulation



- Bring together multiple sources of data to explain a phenomenon

# Summary



- Can be biased in its nature
- Often, may not be generalizable to the population
- Best if a qualitative study can be used in conjunction with a quantitative one