

Sampling in Qualitative Research

□ A sampling plan is the design for how to specifically choose sources for your data.

□ a formal plan specifying sampling method, a sample size, and recruiting procedure.

□ describes how many observations, interviews, focus group discussions or cases are needed to ensure that the findings will contribute rich data.

□ In quantitative studies sampling plan, including sample size, is determined in detail in beforehand in qualitative projects start with a broadly defined sampling plan.

□ sampling plan in qualitative is appropriate when the selected participants and settings are sufficient to provide info needed for a full understanding of phenomenon.

□ Good qualitative researchers engage in purposeful sampling = purposefully choose data that fit the parameters of the project's research questions, goals, and purposes.

□ quantitative studies often aim to maximize statistical power through the use of as large a sample size as feasible, qualitative studies usually work with a small number of cases that are feasible to study in depth.

□ While subjects in quantitative are stripped of their context, smaller numbers in qualitative allows exploration of the detail and richness of the data collected.

□ The setting, where sampling is carried out, is described in detail to provide thick description of context, enabling the reader to make a transferability judgement.

□ Sampling also affects the data analysis, where you continue decision making about whom or what situations to sample next. This is based on what you consider as still missing to get the necessary information for rich findings.

□ Sample sizes for qualitative research vary by technique but generally small.

□ Qualitative research involves non probability sampling, where little attempt is made to generate a representative sample.

□ in qualitative research Participants are sampled deliberately, not randomly.

□ sampling process in qualitative research is iterative and is expected to continue to develop and be refined during the research process iterative sampling approach whereby the research team moves back and forth between sampling and analyzing data such that preliminary analytical findings shape subsequent sampling choices

□ Analysis and interpretation of data collected after initial sampling feeds back to influence sampling methods and decisions regarding sample size.

□ As research progresses and sampling of additional data yields no further themes on analysis, the point of data 'saturation' is reached and sampling can cease.

□ You review the analysis, findings, and quality of participant quotes, and then decide whether sampling might be ended because of data saturation. In many cases, you will choose to carry out 2-3 more cases to confirm that data saturation has been reached

FLEXIBILITY IN QUALITATIVE SAMPLING

When little is known about a phenomenon or setting, a priori sampling decisions can be difficult. In such circumstances, creating a research design that is flexible enough to foster reflection and preliminary analysis may be a good idea.

Some practicalities

□ You don't interview everyone in a community, to get a "good" sample.

□ a critical first step is to select settings and situations where you have access to potential participants.

□ the best strategy to apply is to recruit participants who can provide the richest information (knowledgeable on the phenomenon and can articulate and reflect, motivated to communicate in depth with you).

□ review the sampling plan regularly and adapt when necessary.

Types of sampling

1-Probability sampling: every member of the population has a chance of being selected. It is mainly in quantitative research.

- produce results that are representative of the whole population.

2- non-probability sample, individuals are selected based on non-random criteria, and not every individual has a chance of being included.

- often used in exploratory and qualitative research, where the aim is not to test a hypothesis about a broad population, but to develop an initial understanding of a small or under researched population.

Approaches to sampling in Qualitative Research:

□ non conceptually driven (convenience and opportunistic sampling).

□ conceptually driven (purposeful and theoretical sampling).

Convenience sampling

- the potential participants/ settings/materials that are most easily accessible to the researcher are sampled.
- "Because they are there": people closely surrounding you.
- Advantages: it is less expensive and time and effort intensive.
- most appropriate when the priorities are speed and low cost.
- Many reviewers write off convenience samples as lazy and not credible.
- Ex, when you ask any patient in your clinic who is willing to participate.
- the least desirable sampling method, and should typically be avoided.
- More rigorous alternatives: purposeful and other strategic methods.

Opportunistic (emergent) sampling

- involves the researcher taking advantage of circumstances that occur as the study progresses, for data collection along the way.
- flexible approach lends itself to exploratory field research where little is known about a phenomenon or research setting.
- New opportunities to recruit participants or to gain access to a new site may develop after the fieldwork has begun
- As the observer gains more knowledge of a setting, he can make sampling decisions that take advantage of events, as they unfold.
- Ex: Interviewing homeless people at a shelter, a man tells you where most of the homeless people sleep, so you add this site .

Purposive (judgement) sampling: frequently applied

It involves the researcher deliberately and purposefully selecting the sample they believe can be the most fruitful in answering research Q. can be guided by consideration of variables or qualities of potential participants that affect the contribution they could provide .

These variables may be simple demographics (age, gender and socioeconomic status) also include other aspect such as specific attitudes or beliefs.

Strategies of purposeful sampling

- Maximum variation sampling.
- Homogenous sampling.
- Deviant sampling.
- Typical case sampling.
- Critical case sampling.
- Confirming and disconfirming sampling.
- Stratified purposeful sampling.
- Snowball sampling.

Homogenous sampling: the strategy of picking a small homogeneous sample. (similar backgrounds and experiences, simplifying analysis and facilitating group interviewing)

□ often is used to select focus groups.

Why use this method? when the goal of the research is to understand and describe a particular group in depth.

Maximum variation sampling (Heterogenous sampling)

□ recruitment of participants who vary widely on the dimensions of interest with the aim of identifying central themes/elements that hold true across the diverse sample.

□ researchers access a wide range of data or participants who will represent wide variations of the phenomena under study.

□ allows for multiple perspectives of individuals to be presented that exemplify the complexity of the world

□ For small samples a great deal of heterogeneity can be a problem because individual cases are so different from each other. The maximum variation sampling strategy turns that apparent weakness into a strength by applying the following logic: Any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared aspects or impacts of a program

How does one maximize variation in a small sample?

- identifying diverse characteristics/criteria for constructing the sample.
- Suppose a statewide program has project sites spread around the state, some in rural areas, some in urban areas, and some in suburban areas. The evaluation lacks sufficient resources to randomly select enough project sites to generalize across the state. The evaluator can at least be sure that the geographical variation among sites is represented in the study.

- When selecting a small sample of great diversity, the data collection and analysis will yield two kinds of findings:

- (1) high quality, detailed descriptions of each case, for documenting uniqueness
- 2) important shared patterns that cut across cases and derive their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity.

Why use this strategy?

- Often, researchers want to understand how a phenomenon is seen and understood among different people, in different settings and times.
- the researcher selects a small number of units or cases that maximize the diversity relevant to the research Q.

For example, this strategy was used by Foss and Edson in their study of women's choices about changing their names after marriage. The authors purposefully recruited 3 groups of women.

1 included women who adopted their husbands' name. 2 they kept their birth names.

3 chose new names. To reach these three groups, the authors had to make a concerted effort to recruit women who kept their birth names. They felt the extra effort was worthwhile because their sample variation was necessary for illustrating the complex nature of post marital naming decisions.

Deviant case (extreme instance) sampling

□ selection of extreme or outlying cases of the studied phenomenon, such as crises, exceptions or remarkable failures or successes, in an attempt to glean as much information relevant to the research question as possible from each case.

□ Learning from highly unusual manifestations of the phenomenon of interest.
□ explore the limits of existing theories and potentially develop new concepts.

Ex1, in a study of performance of graduate students, a researcher can select the best and the worse students in class and compare causes of their performances.

Ex2, scholars interested in happiness may choose to interview people who are especially resilient, energetic, and long living, and those interested in crisis sensemaking may purposefully examine tragic disasters.

Ex3 Angela Browne's study, When Battered Women Kill . She conducted in depth studies of the most extreme cases of domestic violence to elucidate the phenomenon of battering and abuse.

The extreme nature of the cases presented are what render them so powerful.

□ Finding (and even knowing what equates with) "extreme" requires first gathering and then sorting through a lot of "typical" data (identifying extreme or deviant cases occurs after some portion of data collection and analysis has been completed).

Stratified purposeful sampling

□ Selects participants from specific sub groups of the population of interest, enabling easier comparison of the variation across sub groups.

□ samples within samples and can be stratified or nested by selecting particular units or cases that vary according to a key dimension.

□ The purpose is to capture major variations rather than to identify a common core, although the latter may also emerge in the analysis.

□ Each of the strata would constitute a fairly homogeneous sample.

□ differs from stratified random sampling in quantitative research in that the sample sizes are likely to be too small for generalization or statistical representativeness.

EX: If you want to study university students, pick a certain number of students from each of the 4 years (sample of freshmen, sophomores, juniors) One may purposefully sample primary care practices and stratify this purposeful sample by practice size (small, medium, large) and practice setting (urban, suburban and rural).

Snowball (chain) sampling (FRIEND OF FRIEND).

□ Researchers begin by identifying several participants who fit the study's criteria and then ask these people to suggest a colleague, a friend. Start with a few respondents and ask them who else might have or know about

EX: Find a few diabetic patients and then ask them who else they know that has diabetes.

□ especially useful when the studied population is hard to access, and/or may not in publicly signal that they belong to the group of interest (e.g. drug users).

□ One downside is that they can quickly skew to one type of group or demographic (as participants tend to suggest others similar to themselves).

□ A potential solution is to recruit a handful of participants who represent a maximum variation, and then to generate several smaller snowballs.

Confirming and disconfirming sampling

□ Usually in later phases of data collection (preliminary fieldwork has already established). Confirmatory cases are additional examples that fit already emergent patterns to add richness, depth and credibility.

(act as a means for placing boundaries around confirmed findings).

□ involves the selection of a mixture of cases that tie in with expectations or findings up to that point in the study and cases which deviate from them.

□ serve to add depth, detail and enhance credibility while the disconfirming cases challenge the prevalent narrative and may bring to light alternative interpretations.

□ utilized at later stages of a study what qualifies as a 'confirming case'.

Typical case (typical instance) sampling

□ focuses on average cases with the aim of building up a profile of a typical case.

□ The case is specifically selected because it is not in any way atypical (extreme).

□ General agreement on what constitutes a 'typical' case required for this approach.

□ researcher should consult several experts in the field of study in order to obtain a consensus as to what ex(s) is typical of the phenomenon and should, be studied.

□ Another option is to use another sampling technique like maximum variation to identify typical cases prior to choosing cases for your study.

EX: studying violence in schools. The first step would be to list all of the criteria that define violence for a "typical" school, then you would choose schools that meet that criteria (schools that are "average" instead of schools with very high or very low violence rates).

Why use this method?

- help a researcher identify and understand the key aspects of a phenomenon as they are manifest under ordinary circumstances.

- Providing a case summary of a typical case can be helpful to those not familiar with a culture or social setting (overview to people with no background).

Critical case (critical incident) sampling

□selects cases that will produce critical information with maximum generalizability of information to other cases.

□The process of selecting a small number of important cases that are likely to "yield the most information and have the greatest impact on the development of knowledge" .

□A good critical case permits logical deductions in the form: "If this is (not) valid for this case, then it is not valid for any (or only a few) cases"

□ Given that the researcher correctly identifies what makes a 'critical case', knowledge gained may be applied to other cases.

Ex1 if it happened to so and so then it can happen to anybody, or if so and so passed that exam, then anybody can pass.

EX2 You want to know how well people understand a new tax law. Ask very educated people if they do not understand it, then probably no one will. Or ask a very uneducated population, if they understand it, most people will.

□ can help with transferring claims to larger populations in the long run.

Why use this method?

- funds are limited. Although sampling for one or more critical cases may not yield findings that are broadly generalizable they may allow researchers to develop logical generalizations from the rich evidence produced when studying a few cases in depth.

□To identify critical cases, the research team needs to be able to identify the dimensions that make a case critical.

Theoretical sampling

□ sampling decisions guided by the theory that emerge from collected data.

□The process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes data and decides what data to collect next and where, in order to develop the theory as it emerges"

□The goal of sampling is to collect data that either further develops or challenges existent hypotheses. Initial cases selected have similar characteristics and are studied in depth. The researcher then samples outlying cases to see whether the developing hypothesis 'holds up'.

□Once no new insights are derived from further data collection, sampling is ceased. This approach necessitates that data analysis and coding commence while data collection is still ongoing. You would have an idea that you had reached a point when additional interviews yield no genuinely new insights.

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□the actual number of cases studied is relatively unimportant, what is important is the potential of each case to aid the researcher in developing theoretical insights into the area of social life being studied.

□After completing interviews with several informants, you consciously vary the type of people interviewed until you have uncovered a broad range of perspectives held by the people in whom you are interested.

SELECTING INFORMANTS

□Qualitative interviewing calls for a flexible research design.

□The researcher starts out with a general idea of which people to interview and how to find them, but is willing to change course after the initial interviews.

□Those new to qualitative research usually want to know exactly how many people they need to interview to complete a study. This is a difficult question to answer prior to conducting some research.

□Kvale : To the common question, "How many interview subjects do I need?" the answer is simply, "Interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know."

□The size of the sample in an interviewing study is something that should be determined toward the end of the research and not at the beginning.

□Although qualitative researchers generally cannot determine sample size prior to conducting a study, people preparing proposals for dissertations or grants are usually expected to specify the number of informants or settings they intend to study.

□IRBs might also require this. You should be prepared to indicate your sample size in proposals, adding that this might change as you start collecting and analyzing data.

Informants can be found in a number of ways.

*on pre fieldwork, one of the easiest ways to build a pool of informants is snowballing but can limit the diversity of your informants

* through the same sources the participant observer uses to gain access to private settings: checking with friends, relatives, and personal contacts; involving yourself with the community of people you want to study; approaching organizations and agencies; advertising in media sources; and announcements through the Internet.

*use email and social media(convenient modes of communication that are used widely), some potential informants might not respond to these kinds of contacts.

EX: In the study of families of young children with which Taylor was involved, the researchers used a range of techniques to locate the families, including checking birth records; contacting day care centers, neighborhood centers, preschools, churches; distributing handouts at local stores; and, in some neighborhoods, conducting a door to door survey (the researchers had identification cards that indicated their affiliation with a university research project).