

# Qualitative and quantitative research: sampling and ethics



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**1. Discuss the main difference between qualitative and quantitative research?**

While qualitative research involves the analysis of unstructured information from interview transcripts, open ended survey responses, photos and videos, quantitative research involves the analysis of numerical data.

According to Reswick, J. B., (1994 p. viii), “ Quantitative and qualitative research differ in at least three major ways. First, the process is very different; second, the tools are different; and, third, the outcomes differ”.

Qualitative research is used to explore and understand people’s attitudes, behaviour, experiences, value systems, concerns, motivations, aspirations, culture or lifestyles. It generates non-numerical data and tries to elicit a detailed opinion from the participants.

In a qualitative study, fewer participants take part in the research but the interaction between the researcher and the subjects is longer. Qualitative research techniques include focus groups, participant observations, content analysis and in-depth interviews. A qualitative type of approach strives for depth allowing the researcher to view behaviour in a natural setting without the artificiality that sometimes surrounds experimental or survey research.

Quantitative research aims to classify its subjects, counting them and constructing statistical models in an attempt to explain what is observed with the data collected being in the form of numbers and statistics. Usually the researcher knows clearly in advance what he or she is looking for. This type of study is considered to be more efficient in data collecting and is able

to test hypotheses, but however as opposed to qualitative methodology, it may miss contextual detail.

Qualitative research is considered to be more flexible, allowing more spontaneity and informal interaction between the researcher and the study participant. Qualitative research uses open ended questions while quantitative research is characterized by close ended questions. With open ended questions, the participant expresses himself or herself more freely than in close ended questions, where a " yes" or a " no" answer is expected. Thus, replies in qualitative research leave more space for subjectivity and interpretation.

For example, if an organization would like to know how many people in Malta are affected by diabetes, the researcher would have to conduct a quantitative study as numerical data is required. On the other hand if a researcher would like to discover what are the bio-psycho-social factors that may influence which patients are able and willing to adhere to a strict regiment, self management behaviour to control their medical situation, a qualitative study would be more suitable.

The research methodology can include both qualitative and quantitative research, as none of them is necessarily more scientific than another; one is not exclusive of the other. Driscoll et al (2007 p. 26) believe that integrating both type of research " can provide pragmatic advantages when exploring complex research questions. The qualitative data provide a deep understanding of survey responses, and statistical analysis can provide detailed assessment of patterns of responses".

**2) What are the advantages of secondary data analysis?**

Secondary data is existing information collected for another purpose, by a person or organization other than the users of the data. Sources of secondary data include census data, national surveys, health care registers, government administrative records such as birth and death registers.

Secondary data is economical, as it is cheaper and quicker to collect than primary data as it reuses and recycles existent data already collected by a third party. According to Boslaugh S. (2007, p. 3) "even if the secondary data set must be purchased, the cost is almost certainly lower than the expense of salaries, transportation, and so forth that would be required to collect and process a similar data set from scratch".

Another advantage of using secondary data is that it takes less time to collect than primary data. It is faster than doing original studies, as web-based materials and search engines makes research for secondary analysis easily accessible. This leaves more time for the researcher to make in depth data analysis, rather than engaging in a primary data collection exercise.

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Secondary data overcomes limited funds and time restrictions allowing the researcher to study large scale populations, particularly if the financial budget is constrained. Another plus is that the researcher using secondary data has often at his disposal "data collection process is informed by expertise and professionalism that may not be available to smaller research projects." Boslaugh S. (2007, p. 4).

Furthermore, secondary data is unobtrusive as corroborated by the Social Research Association (2003, p. 26) report considers secondary data as “one way of avoiding inconvenience to potential subjects is to make more use of available data instead of embarking on a new enquiry”. The researcher does not need to obtain approval from ethics committees or informed consent from the subjects particularly if the study is of the research of a highly sensitive nature such as mental illness or drug abuse.

### **3) How are samples used to describe populations?**

#### **4) Discuss the difficulties with gaining access to the research site and the population.**

Researchers often face a multitude of difficulties to obtain access to the research field, organization or population. It can be “complex and depends on the researcher’s familiarity with the subjects, the location, local culture, bureaucracy, and political situation”. (Mathie, A. & Camozzi, A. (2005). p. 105)

Being familiar with the subjects will enable the researchers to follow the protocol to gain entry more easily into a bureaucratic organization, such as a police force or an education system. The researchers should be prepared to deal with the complexities of facilitating and maintaining access into such organizations and dealing with “gatekeepers” who intentionally or unintentionally prevent easy access to study subjects” (Mathie, A. & Camozzi, A. (2005). p. 105)

Other groups which verge on illegality are very hard to infiltrate. Schrock, A., & Boyd, D., (2008, p. 13), sustain that groups such as “online solicitors of youth, adult offenders participating in Internet-initiated relationships, and <https://assignbuster.com/qualitative-and-quantitative-research-sampling-and-ethics/>

consumers of child pornography remain extremely difficult populations to research". Besides information obtained from incarceration or rehabilitation institutions on those who commit similar crimes, other quantitative data does not exist.

Another difficult study to carry out and gain access to is a secretive subject such as a Masonic Lodge or a cohesive religious cult. It might take years for a researcher to build up a trusting relationship with one of the members and to gain access in such organizations.

The task becomes further extremely difficult when the research involves a sensitive topic such as mental illness. Confidentiality and data privacy issues often crop up and prohibit professionals in revealing their clients' identity to the researcher. Other sensitive issues such as domestic violence, prostitution and poverty might be a hard nut to crack for the novice researcher. Social stigma prevents such vulnerable groups from revealing data to the researcher if he or she is considered as an outsider to their group.

The researchers have to be tactful and use social skills when it comes to taboo subjects such as sexuality, in order to gain trust and acceptance from their subjects and conduct one's research. Researchers must also always keep in mind sensitivity of such subjects and respect the persons' confidentiality.

### **5. What are the major ethical issues in research?**

The researcher has a moral obligation to minimize personal and social harm of the subjects and to safeguard their human rights. The design stage should

be carefully planned covering possible scenarios dealing with ethical issues that might emerge during the research.

Obtaining informed consent from interested subjects is a necessary requisite when conducting research ensuring that the subjects are voluntarily participating and are not coerced in taking part in the study. Fouka, G. & Mantzorou, M. (2011, p. 5) consider that it is essential to inform the prospective research participants about the procedures and risks involved including “ any physical harm or discomfort any invasion of privacy and any threat to dignity” before they give their consent to participate. When subjects are identified from vulnerable groups or individuals with diminished autonomy such as children or people with mental health problems, a written consent from guardians or relatives should be sought.

The participants’ safety, both physical and psychological should be a primary concern for the researcher.” This is accomplished by considering all possible consequences of the research and balances the risks with proportionate balance”. Fouka, G. & Mantzorou, M. (2011, p. 5)

Anonymity and confidentiality are issues closely connected.

Anonymity prevents disclosure of identities, where subjects’ names are changed. The use of pseudonyms is widely used in social science, to prevent the subjects from being identified.

Confidentiality is the management of private information such as confidential communications, personal records and patient records, by the researcher in order to protect the subject’s identity. Data should not be available to third

parties outside the agreement made with the subject. “ The researcher is responsible to maintain confidentiality that goes beyond ordinary loyalty”.

Fouka, G. & Mantzorou, M. (2011, p. 6)

“ The researcher should certainly resist requests for the identity disclosure of any individual subject or subjects when such disclosure could lead to the failure to preserve the anonymity of other subjects who choose not to disclose their identity” Social Research Association(2003. p. 40),

Privacy is a debatable issue. What constitutes a breach of privacy may vary from a society to another, from one culture to another. For example, Kasper, D. V. S (2005) considers both stockpiling and physical observations as invasions of privacy, in which the research participants have little knowledge and even less control. Treece and Treece (as cited in Fouka, G. & Mantzorou, M., 2011, p. 7) suggest that “ privacy can be invaded when researchers study certain groups without their knowledge and without identifying themselves” such as in the case of Humphrie’s study in which he observed homosexuals during sexual activities in public’ men’s rooms.

The researcher should also be familiar and adhere to the relevant laws in which the research is being carried out taking into consideration institutional and governmental policies on the data protection of the individual.