

Advantages and disadvantages: qualitative research



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Qualitative research accepts the fact that there are many different ways of investigating and understanding our social world. It realises that nothing is pre-determined and that there is always room for new findings in the future. It helps understand people in a certain setting. In qualitative research, the methods most commonly used are; qualitative case study, ethnography, content analysis and action research.

There are many advantages and disadvantages of using a qualitative research when investigating our social world. Qualitative research can provide a more in depth and detailed account of why things happen and how they affect the people concerned. On the other hand though, qualitative research deals with small numbers and fewer people are studied therefore it cannot generalise to the wider public or provide statistics – making it not representative of society. For example, how do we know that the findings from one qualitative study can be applied to another setting? (Lecture 3: Dr Gulland) In qualitative research, interviewing has many varying degrees of structure and format. A semi-structured interview is most common in qualitative research as it allows for new evidence to be found – making it more flexible in respect. In 1997 a qualitative interview study took place on a women's understanding of abnormal cervical smear test results. The study took place in different Australian gynaecology clinics. 29 women who had cervical abnormalities and who had recently visited a gynaecologist participated in individual interviews. The objective of the study was to “describe how women interpret their experiences of diagnosis and treatment of a cervical abnormality and how healthcare services for such women can be improved.”(BMJ 1997; 314: 1388) After taking the interviews the results

were that the women wanted to be more involved in the decisions about their care, however they found it difficult to understand the medical terms used and felt unable to ask questions in the consultation. Also not being able to see their cervix made it difficult for women to understand what the abnormality actually was and what the treatment entailed. (BMJ 1997; 314: 1388) “ For some women their gynaecological care was not consistent with the way they understood their abnormality.” (BMJ 1997; 314: 1388)

Another strength of qualitative approach is that it attempts to avoid pre-judgement and tries to represent subjects from their perspectives so the reader can see their views. However, some researchers disagree with this view saying that everyone is judgemental to a certain extent and all have preconceived opinions - making qualitative research too subjective as it may rely too much on what the researcher chooses to focus on.(Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: Chapter 1) The next methodology this essay is going to discuss is ethnography - in the form of participant observation. Participant observation is linked to ethnographic tradition and can involve observing, collecting documents and interviewing. It balances on two roles: participation and observation - however not all of the observations involve the researcher participating, just some (Lecture 3: Dr Gulland). “ While other research methods such as questionnaires and interviews can be, and are, used to gain a wider and more general picture of society, participant observation enables the researcher to gain insight into behaviour through direct experiences”(Marsh, et. al2009)

Another disadvantage of using a qualitative approach is that the quality of evidence found is dependant on the researcher. This is more prominent in <https://assignbuster.com/advantages-and-disadvantages-qualitative-research/>

the cases of conducting; observations, interviews and focus groups. However on the other hand, qualitative research allows for a vast amount of evidence and understanding on why certain things happen and how they affect certain people in our society. A focus group is another qualitative method in which one or a few researchers and several volunteers meet in a group setting to discuss a certain topic. Focus groups are usually tape-recorded or even videotaped. They are efficient as they are able to take in a vast amount of information in a short time. Also focus groups are not too subjective as they allow for a wider range of views on a specific topic - as opposed to other methodologies that achieve the opposite. However, on the other hand focus groups have their limitations as they do not always tend to be applied to highly personal or socially sensitive interviews - one-on-one interviews are better-suited for such topics. In 2003 the WCB (Workers' Compensation Board) tried to confront the issue of health and safety in the workplace for 15-24 year olds. The WCB believed that the parents of these young workers could take an active part in helping to reduce injuries among the youngsters in the workplace.(WCB: 2003) Three focus groups took place in May 2003, where the WCB sought out the opinions of 23 parents, who were asked for feedback on a number of issues regarding health and safety in the workplace. All of the focus group volunteers supported the WCBs plans to introduce a health and safety information resource package for parents and young workers. The findings were that an expandable brochure would be preferred - with a good mix of text and graphics. (WCB: 2003) An analysis of focus group results showed that women were the most likely to be consumers of materials on young worker health and safety, and also according to the focus group discussions, children would be more likely to

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listen to their parents opinions about workplace safety before they enter the employment market.(WCB: 2003)

In conclusion, qualitative research has many strengths and limitations.

Qualitative research provides an in depth more detailed account of thing - it seeks to gain a better understanding of peoples thoughts, attitudes and behaviours. It also creates a sense of openness - it allows people to open up and allows for new evidence that was not even initially considered.

Furthermore, Qualitative research allows for a picture to be built up on the reasons why people behave in a certain way and how they also feel about these actions. However, on the other hand, qualitative research has its weaknesses. Fewer people are studied therefore the collection of the data can be time consuming and also costly. There is also a generalisation problem in qualitative research - because fewer people are studied, it makes the evidence not representative of society. Furthermore, qualitative research can be seen as too subjective and is also dependant on the skills of the researcher. Some sociologists believe in " mixed methods" (applying two or more methodologies to a certain setting). Quantitative research focusses on numbers and statistics. It is the opposite of qualitative research. However if both were applied to a certain setting then surely better results would be found. Not only would you have a more in depth and detailed account, you would also have evidence that was representative and could generalise to the wider public. However, many researchers would disagree with this view saying that it is impossible to combine the two approaches. Therefore, there are many advantages and disadvantages of using a qualitative approach when to research the social world. Each different methodology used in

qualitative approach has its strengths and limitations. Arguably, one method may be more effective than the other – however they each all strive to have a better understanding of our social world.