

Comparing research methods qualitative versus quantitative psychology essay



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The debate of qualitative versus quantitative research is one of the oldest in social research and particularly in psychological investigations. Simply put, the quantitative approach is differentiated by its emphasis on structured, pre-planned design and a categorization of possible research outcomes. It focuses on numbers: events are counted, classified and interpreted through statistical models and tools (Neill, 2007). Options are discrete, and results are directly comparable to similarly conducted analyses. The numerical representations of behavioral data lead to a standard methodology of accepting and rejecting hypotheses and proposed correlations. Qualitative research, however, offers a far less objective analysis of context. In essence, it may be termed a 'descriptive' perspective-areas of interest are highlighted, but a study focusing on them is not prepared as definitively to work towards a specified question from the very start (Neill, 2007). The subject and themes of qualitative research may evolve with the findings throughout the course of the study, and the results obtained therewith are in the form of detailed descriptions or the impressions of the researcher, that are not as easily comparable or generalizable. Qualitative study has been criticized for the rigid objectivity it sacrifices, but the greater depth of analysis and contextual relevance it provides are often the distinct requirements of certain research topics.

The discussion of these major categorical approaches from apparently opposite camps seems to argue that they are mutually exclusive or that one must be rejected in favor of the other. It is easy to assume that such is the case, while highlighting their differences, but this is not, in fact, true. Even engaging to argue which method is shown to be the "superior" of the two is

an unprofitable debate. What matters is understanding which approach is appropriate for specific research goals, and several studies today adopt a blend of these viewpoints, in varying proportions.

Analyzing Qualitative Research

For this assignment, I will analyze and compare two research articles, each adopting one of these approaches. The first is a study entitled Review of assessment and treatment of PTSD among elderly American armed forces veterans that I have selected from the International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry. The authors comprise five university professors and scholars at medical centers from San Diego, Kentucky and Cincinnati. The researchers start out with an explanation regarding the dearth of material pertaining to the prevalence, assessment and treatment of PTSD, specifically in the growing veteran population. The stated objective of the research is to “summarize” existing research and case reports relating to the topic of interest. It is evident that what will follow is a qualitative study, as the researchers are not working to address specific research questions nor are they proposing a hypothesis to verify. This type of review-based undertaking is fairly common, and for its intents and purposes, qualitative analysis will best answer.

From the objective, it is already clear that in providing a descriptive roundup, statistical and numerical complexities can be brushed aside altogether, and an intensive survey of secondary sources will need to be the prime focus.

The data collection is carried out through the researchers themselves, and the methods outlined include an intensive search of scholarly papers from

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specialist online databases. These include PsychINFO, Medline and the National Centre for PTSD's PILOTS database. The methodology here appears to be fairly simplistic, but this should not be confused as necessarily being a component of qualitative research-however, it is the means that was deemed most suitable for the purpose of the review and the resources of its authors.

The results compiled are expressed in detailed, descriptive writing and are in fact, the combined impressions of five industry experts. It still differs from quantitative research in that, despite the credibility and projected impartiality of its authors, qualitative research, through its reliance on the descriptive narrative, is inevitably subjective, even if it is not unreasonably skewed. However, the in-depth analysis allows more discussion of value that provides a deeper understanding of the condition and its impact on effective functioning. The study finds that elderly veterans experience greater somatic symptoms of PTSD than their younger counterparts. The study reports that comorbid diagnoses with depression, substance abuse or cognitive decline impede the assessment and diagnosis of PTSD in the elderly.

The authors go on to insert an opinion culled from their knowledge of literature pertaining to the disorder, by suggesting that existing diagnostic instruments including specific tests and batteries need to establish modified cut-off rates for the appropriate assessment of PTSD in elderly patients. The authors also critique major therapeutic approaches they encountered in published literature, asserting that exposure therapies for this patient group have been insufficiently documented, and that supportive therapy research yields mixed conclusions. Controlled pharmacological testing is also minimal.

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The authors conclude that some medication and psychotherapeutic interventions employed in treating younger patients may prove successful with elderly veterans if the programs are tailored to address the particular needs and experiences of this population. This particular qualitative study has its merits in providing detailed interpretations of existing peer-reviewed research, and as such, does justice to the purpose it had set out to fulfill. Despite the absence of numerical objective comparisons, the discussion finds its own level and dwells on whatever is relevant and interesting for the enlightenment of both the researchers and their targeted audience. Qualitative research, therefore, provides more time and breadth for assimilation of the depth of a particular problem, rather than its generalizability and comparability with other studies. The subjective element of human opinion and reasoning may in fact be a desirable outcome for papers such as these, where the reader may hope to benefit from the delivery of condensed knowledge through credible field experts.

Analyzing Quantitative Research

In contrast to this, I shall now review a study grounded in quantitative research methodology. An Open-Label study of Mirtazapine as Treatment for Combat-Related PTSD is a pharmacological intervention investigation conducted by Australian psychiatrists and university professors, featured in the journal, *The Annals of Pharmacotherapy*.

The authors start with the hypothesis that “antidepressants are effective in reducing symptoms and associated disability” for some PTSD patients. The study declares a clear objective for the research—assessing whether or not

mirtazapine is effective for treating combat-related PTSD among war veterans. So, in the very beginning, the study commences with predetermined possible outcomes and the manner in which the research is conducted is rigorously systemized and monitored. The methods used in this quantitative research, and this study in particular, are in stark contrast to the staple of qualitative analysis. The subjects were clinically diagnosed PTSD patients, recruited over an 18-month timeline during which 13 of the 17 subjects admitted completed the testing protocols. A treatment timeline for analyzing effects of the dose-regulated pharmacotherapy intervention was set in advance. Since quantitative research is often about testing and proving or disproving relationships through numerical representations rather than logical argument, it follows that the instruments utilized by quantitative researchers will also substantially differ. The instruments and methodology were of particular relevance to the original research questions posed, and were chosen for their repeatability and re-evaluative properties. The lack of an involved subjective discussions means that PTSD and its symptomology and functional impact is not explained in as much depth, but then this is not relevant to the question posed by the study, to begin with.

Quantitative research in this case relies on standardized psychological instruments (tests) for diagnosing and assessing PTSD conditions.

Specifically, these included the Mississippi Scale for Combat-Related PTSD, the Clinician-Administered PTSD Scale (CAPS), and the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS). A number of biochemical assessments accompanied the psychometric measurements, including blood glucose, total

serum cholesterol and serum triglycerides, with baseline measurements repeated after three months.

The study's results are organized into statistical measurements comparing pre-and post-treatment scores. Mean CAPS scores decreased, and in four cases, even went below diagnostic cut-off levels, indicating a remission of PTSD. The mean Mississippi scale and HADS measurements also decreased, though a greater proportion of subjects still tested at higher-than-cut-off levels. All subjects had gained weight from baseline measurements. The study goes on to document individual aberrations in two subjects in terms of testing positive for diabetes mellitus and gaining a much larger proportion of weight than others. It is important to report every aspect of the biomedical and psychometric pre-and-post-treatment testing so that the effects of extraneous variables and individual differences can be factored in while interpreting the outcomes. The authors limit their commentary on their findings to the bare bones of the facts themselves. This is in keeping with the quantitative essence of representing facts verbally as succinctly as functionally possible, to limit the entry of notes of personal judgment and observation. In later parts of the study, the findings may of course be used to remark upon and identify trends within repeated or similar trials, but here again, some qualitative elements must necessarily be ushered in.

The authors view the decreased post-intervention scores on the diagnostic tests as an indicator of decreased symptom presentation in PTSD and a psychological alleviation of the condition and the impairment associated with it. The gain in weight has also been identified as a positive effect, and linked to reduced depression. The authors acknowledge that the study suffered

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from methodological limitations and a small sample size, but, for what it is worth, its conclusions do imply that mirtazapine can be prove useful in treating combat-related PTSD. Although the authors go on to state that additional research using double-blind, placebo-controlled study designs would yield more conclusive results, they have managed to prove, within their contextual framework and resources, that there is some substance to their hypothesis.

Here again is one of the most fundamental differences between quantitative and qualitative research perspectives. For qualitative research, the discussion, questions and ideas generated by an overview of a topic of interest is often the objective itself. Qualitative methodologies will describe, interpret, question, identify trends and qualitatively compare the effectiveness of treatments, the impact of conditions, the applications of particular psychological models, etc. However, qualitative research is largely unconcerned with proving or disproving speculated relationships, and even when it seeks to argue a point, it does so through logical, narrative debate which is still, ultimately, a matter of personal judgment.

Quantitative research is particularly interested in analyzing and modeling hypothetical relationships between variables, to demonstrate how these might be manipulated and the knowledge gained preferably used to advantage.

Conclusion

Which research approach to choose does not depend on a citation of the individual merits and demerits of each-in fact, the value of either is relative <https://assignbuster.com/comparing-research-methods-qualitative-versus-quantitative-psychology-essay/>

to the purpose for which it is required. For a compilation and understanding of symptomology and treatment approaches within maladjustment case studies, greater depth of psychological coverage would be needed, and the researchers involved would most probably draw upon the qualitative methods of observation, history analysis and patient self-report. When the concern is a drug trial, as the one discussed above, or the social-issue questionnaire, quantitative methods will provide the most comprehensive framework within which investigation data may be pooled and expressed in a standardized, condensed form. Qualitative data is particularly relevant in sharing and validating information across the scientific community, as established protocols and instruments which are easily comparable and repeatable, are utilized. A blend of the two approaches now focuses on drawing more commentary and analysis on quantitative findings, and to understand their contextual, rather than mere reductionist paper-based, framework.