

WHAT IS QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: SESSION 1

What is qualitative research?

Qualitative research is often referred to as naturalistic inquiry because the research is conducted in a natural rather than experimental setting and the methods were developed within the social and human sciences (Pope and Mays 1995, Malterud 2001).

Kitto and colleagues see the aim of qualitative research methods as exploring the “behaviour, processes of interaction, and the meanings, values and experiences of purposefully sampled individuals and groups in their “natural” context” (Kitto, Chesters et al. 2008).

Therefore, through their application, qualitative research methods provide research participants with the opportunity to express their own lived realities and allow researchers to understand how social experience is created and understood in everyday life (Mays and Pope 1995).

Malterud (2001) defines a number of areas in which qualitative methods are useful, including: “human and social experience, communication, thoughts, expectations, meaning, attitudes, and processes, especially related to interaction, relation, development, interpretation, movement and activity” (Malterud 2001: 398).

Qualitative research methods are most appropriate when a topic is sensitive, of a personal nature, or when little is understood about topic understood. This is in contrast to a survey that provides participants with a pre-defined set of responses where as qualitative methods allow the researcher to be sensitive and responsive to the participant’s language and the iterative nature allows the researcher to explore unexpected issues as they emerge (Pole and Lampard 2002).

Bibliography

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