

PLANNING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: SESSION 2

What is an aim?

In general a qualitative research study will have one broad statement of what the study is setting out to achieve or to contribute towards. In this statement it usually identifies a target group or population that will be the focus of the study and usually describes what the study is trying to do.

What are study objectives?

Qualitative studies normally have a number of objectives. These are a more specific statement of what the study needs to do to achieve the overall aim. Given the iterative nature of qualitative research the objectives can begin with broader statements but become more specific as the research process gets underway.

What are research questions?

Research questions ask what you want to find out i.e. a specific question you are seeking the answer to. This is in contrast to research objectives which state what you are going to do. These can be at the “bigger picture” level which asks a broad research question but they can also be developed at the level of objectives and can guide how specific questions are asked.

How to prioritise problems for research?

A number of questions can help to answer whether a research topic should be prioritised:

1. Is the topic relevant?
2. Does it duplicate other work?
3. Is it feasible (especially when you consider the resources available)?
4. Is it politically acceptable?
5. How applicable are possible results or findings?
6. How urgently is the information required?
7. Is the topic ethical?

Qualitative research and the iterative process

It is important to remember that qualitative research is an iterative process and the “Rather than starting with a research question or hypothesis that precedes any data collection, the researcher is encouraged not to separate the the stages of design, data collection and analysis, but to go backwards and forwards between the raw data and the process of conceptualisation, thereby making sense of the data throughout the period of data collection’ (Pope and Mays, 1995:44)