Interuniversity Symposium on Qualitative Research in Medical & Health Sciences (27.09.16)

Applying qualitative research in various health care domains

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WHAT CAN BE STUDIED...

Decision-making of physicians in limiting life support

Barriers and opportunities to reduce urinary catheters use

Impact of clinical leadership on trust in the emergency department

Impact of self-harm of young people on parents and families

Reflections of students regarding education on communication with patients about death and dying

Patient-caregiver relationships in the management of illness, treatment,…
WHAT CAN BE STUDIED...

Experiences of uncertainty and ambiguity in advanced liver disease

The role of pharmacists in mediating antibiotics in hospitals

Group standards and socialization processes in nursing teams

Experiences of family members regarding caregiving for serious ill patients

Experiences of occupational therapists in preventing falls in the home environment

Exposure, coping and reintegration of soldiers returning from war

Success factors of hospitals in increasing B-blokker use after myocardial infarction

SOME EXAMPLES...

• On phenomena on the level of public health
  • ...

• On quality improvement and hospital management
  • ...

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SOME EXAMPLES...

- On people’s coping, emotional distress, .. (theoretical constructs and concepts)
  - Ekanayake et al. (2013) “We lost all we had in a second”: coping with grief and loss after a natural disaster. World Psychiatry Feb;12(1):69-75.
  - ...

- On professionals’ attitudes, perspectives or roles towards clinical phenomena, decision making, treatments, infection management, professionalism, ...
  - ...

SOME EXAMPLES...

- On patients’ attitudes, perspectives, decision making, towards disease, treatment, prognosis, ...
  - Duane et al. (2016) Using qualitative insights to change practice: exploring the culture of antibiotic prescribing and consumption for urinary tract infections. BMJ
  - ...

- On family members’ attitudes and perspectives towards disease, treatment, prognosis, ...
  - Totman et al. (2015) You only have one chance to get it right: A qualitative study of relatives’ experiences of caring at home for a family member with terminal cancer. Palliative medicine. 29(6):496-507.
  - ...
WHAT IS QUALITATIVE RESEARCH?

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports, detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (Creswell).

Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretative naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studies use and collection of a variety of empirical material - case studies, personal experience, introspective, life study, interview, observational, historical interactional and visual texts - that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals’ lives.

(Denzin & Lincoln)
IN SEARCH FOR UNDERSTANDING

Every researcher tries to understand ‘something’
Irrespective of discipline
Searching for ‘insight’
Research question?

SOME BASICS...

Theoretical and philosophical ideas about research

**Ontology:** What is the very nature of reality and existence?

**Epistemology:** What counts as valid knowledge?

**Methodology:** Which principles and ideas to base our procedures and strategies?
RETURNING TO OUR ROOTS...

- The natural science model:
  - Positivism:
    - universal laws, objective picture of the world
    - testing theories and hypotheses (deductive approach)
  - Objectivism
  - Value neutrality

- Comte (1798-1857): positivism in social sciences
- Popper (1959): falsifiability (deductive)

... LEADING TO A PARADIGM DEBATE

Kuhn 1962, 1970: a shift of theoretical ideas and technical procedures that a group of scientists adopt and which are rooted in a particular world view with its own language and terminology

Controlled conditions of traditional approaches, measurable behaviour and cause and effect

The nature of the human condition (human interaction and feelings, thoughts and perceptions)
... LEADING TO A PARADIGM DEBATE

Weber’s Verstehen (1893)
Reflective reconstruction and interpretative understanding of human beings (finding meaning in intentions and goals of individuals)

Phenomenology (Husserl, 1859-1938 en Heidegger, 1889-1976)
Focus on ontological questions of meaning and lived experience

... LEADING TO A PARADIGM DEBATE

Studying context-bound phenomena - not free from time and location

or the mind of the human actor

Grasping socially constructed nature of the world
values and interests = part of research

Complete objectivity / neutrality = impossible to achieve
values of all participants = part of research
... LEADING TO A PARADIGM DEBATE

Requires researchers to
• adopt a self-critical stance and take into account their own position in the setting and situation
• accept and bear ambiguity
• proceed in a well structured and systematic way

... as the social world is not orderly nor systematic

MORE RECENT IDEAS..

Postmodernism
Suggests that much of what people consider as facts is relative and subjective
Stresses the multiplicity of perspectives and lack of a unitary view of truth

Social constructionism
Social reality = product of social processes, tied and relative to context, time and culture. Human beings construct it themselves
GAINING SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE

Methodology

Hypothesis
(Theoretical) framework

Deductive
Quantitative

Mixed Method
Design

Inductive
Qualitative

Empirical research

Understanding
Gaining insight

Research process

• Literature review
• Formulating research question/hypothesis
• Choosing research method (design, sampling)
• Data collection
• Data analysis (statistics)
• Reporting

Research question

Literature review

Research approach

Data analysis

Data collection

Reporting

Establishing quality

Validity

Reliability

Trustworthiness

CONFLICTING OR COMPLEMENTARY PERSPECTIVES?

• Using both approaches pragmatically, dependant on the research question?
• Incompatible and mutually exclusive because of different epistemologies?

Ideas?
QUALITATIVE RESEARCH CANNOT...

- Compare entire populations
- Give an account on prevalence, amounts, quantities, degrees, rates, ...
- Be easily generalized...

MAIN FEATURES OF A QUALITATIVE APPROACH?

1. The data have primacy
2. The context is crucial (holistic inquiry)
3. Immersion in the natural setting (naturalistic inquiry)
4. The focus on the ‘emic’-perspective
5. ‘Thick description’ is indispensable
6. The researcher influences (relationship)
7. Reflexivity is essential

Holloway & Wheeler, 2013
MAIN FEATURES OF A QUALITATIVE APPROACH?

Tightrope walkers suffering in silence: A qualitative study into the experiences of older parents who have an adult child with cancer

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ABSTRACT

Background: Given the worldwide ageing of the population and the changes in the structure of society and family, the likelihood increases that older parents face a serious illness in an adult child and will even outlive their child. 

Objectives: To gain insights into older parents’ experiences, concerns, and otherwise regarding their position and role as a parent of an adult child with cancer.

Design: Qualitative interview design.

Setting: A geriatric ward and four oncology wards of a university hospital; several nursing homes, local health service agencies.

Participants: Twenty-five parents (age range 65–91 years) of 22 adult children with cancer (age range 33-66 years) of suffering stages and types (with a preponderance of breast cancer).

Method: Using a qualitative research methodology underpinned by grounded theory, we conducted semi-structured interviews with a fairly open framework.

Results: Suffering in silence emerged as the core category evapourating three interrelated balancing acts: (1) sheltering their child while being shielded by their child, (2) being involved while keeping an adequate distance, and (3) shifting attentional patterns between their child, themselves, and others. The emotional interconnection between older parents and their adult child with cancer becomes tangible in the transformational process of their parental role and position described in the three balancing acts.

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MAIN FEATURES OF A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

Some misconceptions...

“Qualitative research is not scientific nor rigorous research as the researcher is not objective”

“You cannot generalize qualitative research because of the small sample sizes”

“In order to collect a lot of data rapidly, focus group interviews are the best”

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TO APPLY OR NOT TO APPLY...
USEFULNESS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN HEALTHCARE

Health is connected to

• social construction of illness, prevention, treatment and risk;
• experiencing and managing effects of disease and its treatment;
• decision-making around the areas of birth, dying and potential technological interventions;
• factors affecting quality of care either positively or negatively, linked to access to care, promotion of good health and prevention of disease.

Sandelowski 2004

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TO APPLY OR NOT TO APPLY...
USEFULLNESS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN HEALTHCARE

Healthcare can only be effective if healthcare includes aspects which influence health (even though the latter are subjective in nature (= connected to the individual)

Qualitative research provides insight into these subjective experiences, processes, lived experiences, and decisions.

TO APPLY OR NOT TO APPLY...
CHOOSING AN APPROACH FOR YOUR RESEARCH

Depending on
• nature and type or research question or problem;
• epistemio logical stance of the researcher;
• capabilities and knowledge of the researcher;
• skills and training of the researcher;
• available resources for the research project.
TO APPLY OR NOT TO APPLY...  
CHOOSING AN APPROACH FOR YOUR RESEARCH

Tips before you start!

- Carefully consider the research question
- Carefully consider the phenomenon to be studied
- Carefully consider the type of knowledge you seek
- Study your approach with care and get to know it in detail (even though you might diverge)

REFERENCES (EXAMPLES OF QUALITATIVE STUDIES)

- Duan et al. (2016) Using qualitative insights to change practice: exploring the culture of antibiotic prescribing and consumption for urinary tract infections. BJU
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REFERENCES (IMPORTANT LITERATURE)

To begin...

REFERENCES
(Important Literature)


More advanced...

THANK YOU
FOR YOUR ATTENTION!