

# Qualitative Research (or Study of the Human Experience)

Elizabeth Card, MSN, APRN, FNP-BC, CPAN, CCRP – ASPAN Director for Research



**Elizabeth Card**  
MSN, APRN, FNP-BC,  
CPAN, CCRP  
ASPAN Director for  
Research

Qualitative research focuses on the lived experience, the human response to a particular situation and the meaning that the person brings to or assigns to those particular situations.<sup>1</sup> Qualitative studies also explore concepts or specific variables of interest in areas in which a great deal of research has already been completed, but lack the human perspective.<sup>2</sup> Through these explorations, qualitative researchers develop theories and gain insight useful in understanding the process that persons experience and journey through when dealing with an issue. Qualitative research studies strive to increase understanding of the unique human experience. The research is not hypothesis driven, but rather, focused on gaining insight and is understanding-driven.

## Qualitative Research Process

There are general principles that guide the design of the qualitative research project. First is the study question. These questions are written very generally and summarize what the study examines. Often, these questions are followed by “sub-questions” that further refine what will be examined. Next is a systematic review of the literature. This review provides the researcher a basis to understand the current state of the science. Existing evidence is used to highlight why the proposed research study is important and focuses on the gap in the literature. This step is followed by defining the theoretical perspective that guides the research and how that theory will be used. If the project is generating a new theory, then there should be discussion of the theory.<sup>1,2</sup>

## Research Design

Next is selection of the appropriate design for the research project. Several designs can be used. These include:

- Qualitative descriptive method describes the phenomena and does not interpret
- The ethnography method requires the researcher to be present in the cultural environment they are studying. This allows for direct observation with interviews for data collection
- The grounded theory method focuses on how and why persons construct meanings in specific situations

- The descriptive phenomenology method ensures the interviews occur in an openly neutral worded way. It probes the participants to gain clarification and elaboration of their experience with the topic of interest
- The hermeneutic phenomenology method interprets and explains meaning in relation to context. This interpretation is gained through analysis of the dictated conversations with persons who are living the experience of interest
- The narrative/life story method uses open ended interview questions to guide the conversation with persons who have lived the experience of interest
- The focus group analysis method generates data from group discussions and interactions typically led by a group leader<sup>1,2</sup>

## Formulation of Purpose and Direction of the Study

The next principle of qualitative research is to create or formulate a purpose statement. This gives direction and focus to the study. Establishing the significance of the study lays the groundwork for the study to evolve. Describing the research procedures, or steps taken to conduct the project, including describing the participants, including sampling methods and strategies, ethical considerations, how the data was collected, analyzed and interpreted, and, lastly, how the scientific rigor and quality of the study was maintained. Qualitative research adds a dimension and rich understanding to a phenomenon that compliments the understanding gained through quantitative methods.

## REFERENCES

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