

Principles of good qualitative research

Oxfordshire JSNA (Health and Wellbeing Facts and Figures)

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1. Introduction

This document sets out the different types of qualitative research, the key principles of good quality research and a checklist for use in assessing reports for inclusion in the Oxfordshire JSNA.

2. Types of qualitative research

Qualitative research might include:

a) Focus groups

A form of group interview that focuses on communication between research participants (e.g. service users) to generate data. Participants discuss a certain topic and their opinions and attitudes are then recorded and analysed.

b) In-depth interviews

A form of intensive individual interview usually carried out with a small number of respondents, to explore their perspectives on a particular service or issue. It may cover only one or two issues, but in great detail.

c) Semi-structured interviews

A form of interview that uses open ended questions that define the area to be explored, at least initially, and from which the interviewer or interviewee may diverge in order to widen the initial research focus.

d) Observation

A systematic and detailed observation of behaviour and talk: watching and recording what people do and say.

e) Narrative analysis or inquiry

An approach that includes using stories (e.g. case studies), autobiographical accounts, journals, letters, conversations, interviews, family stories and life experiences as the units of analysis to research and understand subjective experiences.

3. Key Principles for Good Qualitative Research

Good quality or 'rigour' in qualitative research means research that has been undertaken in a systematic and carefully considered way, with a clear, defensible explanation of the approach and how the researcher(s) arrived at their findings.

¹ There are two types: 'covert' observation and 'overt' observation. For more information see <http://www.qualityresearchinternational.com/socialresearch/participantobservation.htm>

Adopting the five key principles outlined in '*Listen and learn. Key principles for good qualitative research: How charities can use qualitative research*'¹, published by New Philanthropy Capital, will ensure that the qualitative data that we incorporate into the JSNA, is meaningful and credible.

4. Practical 'checklist'

Below is a practical checklist which details the five key principles. It aims to support the development and inclusion of qualitative data by ensuring that it meets agreed quality standards.

The questions are to be used as guide only in considering how to frame the 'call for (qualitative) evidence' or to assess the validity, reliability and meaningfulness of a particular piece of qualitative research (including case study) when making a decision on whether to include it, or not in the JSNA commentary.

Qualitative research data 'checklist'	
<p>1. Are the findings and data presented valid (meaningful)?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the initial aims and objectives of the research clear and well defined? • Are research questions being asked in a relevant and accurate way? • Does the information provided aid our understanding of the issue/s? • Do the findings describe the context/circumstances the work was undertaken in so that considerations regarding its transferability (whether it is likely to apply) to other settings/areas can be made?
<p>2. Are the findings and data presented reliable (dependable)?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a clearly documented research process and approach to data analysis demonstrating how findings were reached? • Has the qualitative data been 'coded', so as to 'draw out' key themes and issues? • Is the research methodology used clearly explained? • Would others draw the same conclusions if presented with the same data?

¹ <https://www.thinknpc.org/resource-hub/listen-and-learn-how-charities-can-use-qualitative-research/>

<p>3. Have the findings been corroborated (confirmed) through different sources?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the analysis process compare and bring together different data sources (triangulation)? • Are multiple people involved in data collection and analysis (to avoid researcher bias/dominance)? • Has the researcher shared the findings with participants (enabling them to verify the findings)?
<p>4. Has bias been minimised or at least acknowledged?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Given qualitative research involves subjective judgements and interpretations, bias cannot be 'removed' from the process). • Has contrary evidence been included / explained? • Has 'selection bias' been avoided? (in the selection of sample) • Has 'researcher bias' been avoided? (has the researcher avoided influencing the research with their own views/behaviour)
<p>5. Does the research portray beneficiaries and/or their issues in a responsible and sensitive way?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the research beneficiaries portrayed in a respectful and accurate manner? • Could the narrative (detailing subjective experiences) be construed as exploiting people's personal 'stories'? • Have issues regarding respecting and protecting confidentiality (sensitive topics) been considered?