

CONDUCTING A QUALITATIVE HEALTH RESEARCH STUDY

A PLAN FOR DETERMINING WHEN, HOW, WHY, AND WHAT YOU NEED

KEY MESSAGES

- Qualitative health research focuses on exploring social or human phenomena within the health-illness continuum, employing distinct methodologies
- In designing a qualitative health research study, it is critical to select the research design that best answers the research question and addresses the research purpose.
- Common research designs include: qualitative description, interpretive description, case study, focused ethnography or grounded theory

QUALITATIVE HEALTH RESEARCH IS A SUB-DISCIPLINE OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DISTINGUISHED BY:¹

FOCUS

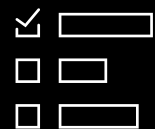
Social or human phenomena that are described, explored, or explained within the health - illness continuum

METHODS

Distinct methods that centre the person with decisions informed and determined by an understanding of the health or illness state or the context of the participant

DOMAINS OF QUALITATIVE HEALTH RESEARCH:¹

- Identification of healthcare needs
- Examination of processes related to seeking healthcare
- Exploration of the illness experience
- Examination of trajectories of recovery (e.g., from illness, with a condition)
- Description of the behaviours and experiences of healthcare providers
- Examination of the education and practices of healthcare professions
- Development or evaluation of healthcare interventions, programs, policies
- Advancement of qualitative health research methods
- Examination of processes or factors of implementation science



IF YOU ARE NEW TO QUALITATIVE HEALTH RESEARCH, YOU MAY CONSIDER ENGAGING AN EXPERIENCED METHODOLOGIST TO PROVIDE GUIDANCE.

A checklist to get you started on the design and conduct of a qualitative health research study:

ESTABLISH A RESEARCH TEAM

- Include people with content and methods expertise
- Consider adding a team member with specific skills (e.g., data generation or analysis approach)
- Engage in reflexivity

IDENTIFY AND SOURCE STUDY SPECIFIC RESOURCES

- Qualitative or mixed methods data analysis software
- Additional training
- Transcription service
- Training or support for advisory group or community partners



ARTICULATE A PROBLEM STATEMENT

- To describe, explain, or explore
- To gain a deeper understanding
- To generate data to understand a practice issue
- To formatively or inductively develop an idea
- To conduct a process evaluation

WRITE A RESEARCH QUESTION

EPPiC:

- Emphasis, purposeful sample, phenomenon of interest, context



SELECT AN APPROPRIATE STUDY DESIGN

Generate applied knowledge and evidence:

- Qualitative description, Interpretive description, Focused ethnography, Case study

Generate theoretical knowledge or evidence:

- Grounded theory, phenomenology

DESCRIBE THE CONTEXT OF THE PHENOMENON

- The circumstances, conditions, or setting of the phenomenon to give meaning and relevance
- Can facilitate transferability for the knowledge user

DEVELOP A PURPOSEFUL SAMPLING STRATEGY

- Identify number and type of data sources
- Determine the inclusion criteria for each source
- Explore what approaches will be used (e.g., homogenous, maximum variation, theoretical)
- Estimate sample size based on information power
- Consider different approaches to recruitment



DEVELOP A DATA GENERATION PLAN



- What strategy will be used to generate data?
- Who is involved in data generation?
- Where will data generation occur?
- How will the data be recorded and managed?
- How will participants' and researchers' emotional safety be prioritized?

DEVELOP A DATA ANALYSIS PLAN

- Analytic strategy should be methodologically congruent with chosen study design



INTEGRATE STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE TRUSTWORTHINESS

- Triangulation, peer debriefing, time sampling
- Approaches to analysis that promote data dependability
- Develop and maintain an audit trail

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

¹Morse, J. (2012). *Qualitative health research: Creating a new discipline*. New York: Routledge.

Moisey, L.L., Campbell, K.A., Whitmore, C., & Jack, S.M. (2022). Advancing qualitative health research approaches in applied nutrition research. *Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics*, 35(2), 376-387. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jhn.12989>

Jack, S. M., Orr, E., Campbell, K. A., Whitmore, C., & Cammer, A. (2023). A framework for selecting data generation strategies in qualitative health research studies. *Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics*, 36(4), 1480-1495. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jhn.13134>