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# 15/MHS 02/002

# NSC 414

# QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: DATA COLLECTION

##### Different methods are used in qualitative research. The most common are interviews, focus group discussions, observational methods and document analysis. Combining two or more data collections methods, for instance interviews as well as focus groups (‘data triangulation’) enhances the credibility of the study. Irrespective of the data collection method applied, it is important to keep a diary during the study, with reflections on the process (e.g. regarding method and participant selection) and the role and influence of the researcher

#### **Interviews**

##### Interviews are useful to explore experiences, views, opinions, or beliefs on specific matters. Accounts can be explored and compared to others, to develop an understanding of the underlying structures of beliefs (See chapter 4 in Green & Thorogood, 2010). There are different grades of structuring the interview: structured, semi-structured or open/in-depth, dependent on the characteristics of structuring the interview by the researcher. Often the researcher develops a topic list before the start of the interview, which can be used in a flexible manner. As the interview is a product of interaction between the researcher and the interviewee, the setting and skills of the researcher are of importance (e.g. the ability to build a sense of trust (developing rapport), the way of phrasing questions, give the interviewee room to tell a story, body language). Furthermore, it is important to think about the type of transcription of audio tapes.

#### **Focus group discussions**

##### Focus group discussions are useful to examine how social knowledge is produced. The researcher stimulates discussion in order to examine how knowledge and ideas develop and operate in a given group. Most of the times, a facilitator guides a discussion about a particular topic in a group of usually 6-12 people. Some sensitive issues might be more easy discussed within a group, although other (personal) information might be withheld, for instance when persons are acquainted with each other or because of hierarchical relations within the group. The role of the facilitator is to create an open atmosphere, involve participants in the discussion and manage this discussion. The organization of a focus group requires careful attention. This includes the sampling and recruitment of participants, the composition of the topic list and how the data will be collected.

#### **Observational methods**

##### Observational methods are used to understand phenomena by studying people’s accounts and actions in an everyday context. There are different types of observations, with various degrees of research participation, like non-participating observation (e.g. by using video recordings), and participant observation or ethnography. Ethnography ‘usually involves the researcher participating, overtly or covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts’

#### **Document analysis**

##### Document analysis is based on existing sources, like government reports, personal documents, articles in newspapers, books or medical records.

# 2) Quantitative Data Collection Methods

Quantitative research methods describe and measure the level of occurrences on the basis of numbers and calculations. Moreover, the questions of “how many?” and “how often?” are often asked in quantitative studies. Accordingly, quantitative data collection methods are based on numbers and mathematical calculations.

Quantitative research can be described as ‘entailing the collection of numerical data and exhibiting the view of relationship between theory and research as deductive, a predilection for natural science approach, and as having an objectivist conception of social reality’[[1]](https://research-methodology.net/research-methods/quantitative-research/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn1). In other words, quantitative studies mainly examine relationships between numerically measured variables with the application of statistical techniques.

Quantitative data collection methods are based on random sampling and structured data collection instruments. Findings of quantitative studies are usually easy to present, summarize, compare and generalize.

* [Qualitative studies](https://research-methodology.net/research-methods/qualitative-research/), on the contrary, are usually based on non-random sampling methods and use non-quantifiable data such as words, feelings, emotions ect. The table below illustrates the main differences between qualitative and quantitative data Examples of qualitative data include: male/female, smoker/non-smoker, or questionnaire response (agree, disagree, neutral).