

OBSERVATION (FIELD RESEARCH)

Types of Observation

Non-participant

Participant

Covert

Ethnography

Examples

Participant observation study on sex workers (covert)

Non-participant Observation study on tea rooms (covert)

Non-participant observation study on surfers and drug use

Participant observation study on men's drumming organizations

Non-participant observation study on gender and children's play

When to Use

1. Too much error in accounts/recounts. Need to study topic in natural setting.
2. Too much bias with researcher presence in doing interviews:
3. RQ has to do with behavior or a setting. How people act in public places or the informal rules of interaction. Examples are funerals and meetings. Need natural setting.
4. You need to experience the phenomenon in order to understand it (examples: stripper study, men's movement)
5. Data not available via interviews: people not available, unethical (Ex. Children)

Data Collection

1. Need to develop an observation guide which identifies what you will look for in each case/document. Consult lit, experts, people who experience/d topic
 2. Decide if you will be participant or non-participant. Depends on the topic and the setting.
 - can you be a participant?
 - can you be a non-participant? Difficult to be a true non-participant.
 - how will people react to you in each of these roles?
 3. Covert or non-covert: sometimes impossible to be non-covert with large groups or public settings
 4. Obtrusive or unobtrusive
 5. Pick a setting. Driven by RQ. (Go over in sampling section)
What is accessible (example: my list of possibilities)
 6. Researcher identity in setting: researcher, gender, student, etc..
 - a. new roles - can you do them?
Examples: hockey study; my involvement with DEP
 - b. personality: outgoing or shy
 - c. developing rapport, acceptance in setting: Balance friendly/over friendly. People may ignore you, be suspicious, threatened, accept you, etc.. Have to prove yourself. It is a process, takes 3-6 months.
- key informants can help with acceptance.

Documentation

Observation notes: (immediately after observation. 1 hour of observation= 3 hours of notes)

1. Description of setting, participants, researcher
2. Everything that happened
3. Reflective comments on observation
4. Explanation/understanding of RQ thus far in project (note patterns)

Maps/pictures

Problems with Observation Studies

1. Researcher presence can bias participants' behavior and setting (exception unobtrusive, document analysis)
2. More extensive and exhaustive than interviews. Longer, interrupts schedules (not good for people with kids), your role in the setting is less clear than with interviews

Pre-Tests and Pilots in Qualitative Research

1. Pre-test questions/issues you plan to collect data on, for interviews, observation, or documents.
2. Formal pilots rarely done because access is difficult to get and don't want to lose it once gained.
3. Formal pilots often not necessary because qualitative already allows flexibility in design. First few months of a study are the "pilot."

Data Verification

Reliability and validity of Qualitative data (internal and external validity)

reliability = accuracy of data

validity = generalizability of findings

Reliability and validity are not as much of a separate issue in Qualitative research.

Depends on how well the RQ fits the method. Purpose of the research. The thoroughness of the design. The role of the researcher. The rigor of your application of the design. Whether you systematically collected and analyzed data.

Need to convey all this in your Methods section. Audience needs to trust your science.

Additional Options

1. Get key informants to review your work. See if it rings true to them.
2. Triangulation: if similar findings, more Reliability
3. Peer evaluation
4. External validity: Look in lit for similar findings with different groups.

Internal and External Validity in Qualitative Research

Ethics

1. Implications of the research findings for the participants

2. Purpose of the research

3. What do participants get out of research. Are you giving back anything.

4. Ethical issues with each method for studying your RQ:

questions asked (trauma, tragedy, legal issues): ex. Gay Friends study and drugs

observations made: example: Gay Friends study - people not always comfortable with non-gay presence

5. How you gained access

6. Researcher style: do you harass people?

7. Role of researcher: too much rapport? See you as a friend or a therapist. (Example: Gay Friends study)

8. Putting participants or self at risk (Example: Gay Friends study – “jump” in parking lot)

9. Informed consent:

Did you give enough info about study?

Do they know how you will use the data?

Do they know what you are counting as “data”? Do you use all info revealed or observed?

Do you give opportunity for them to withdraw?

Do you use info that participants reveal about others, people who haven’t given consent?

Can be hard to get informed consent with observation and document studies:

ex. Public officials, public places, public documents, documents on the deceased

ex. May get permission from owner of picture, but not of person in picture

10. Confidentiality: how protected?

Where do you draw the line: protecting them versus their confidentiality (ex. Participant reveals suicidal thoughts, deep depression)

Combining Qualitative Methods

Triangulation often done with qualitative projects

Answer questions from page 79-80 Qualitative Researching

How can each method help me answer my RQ? What data will each provide that the other won't?

How do the different methods feed into each other? How do they integrate for this RQ? Must be a connection in the interview/observation guides and the data collected. Must complement each other.

You have to weave all the data and findings together to tell 1 coherent explanation.

Ex. Dr. Myers' study

- How will I derive data from each method?
- Can I feasibly do all this? Need to cut back on the number of interviews, observations, etc.

Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Methods

Often done in evaluation research

Can be difficult to do.

Gives all sides of an issue.

Qualitative often used to define issues/questions for research. Quantitative to get the data.

Qualitative often used to explore findings of Quantitative research.

Evaluating Qualitative Research

*see checklist pg 144 Research Design

More Sources on Qualitative

pg 103-107 Designing Research

see end of each chapter Qualitative Researching

Analysis: Miles and Huberman, 1994. Qualitative Data Analysis. Sage.