

Sampling in Qualitative Research

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Learning objectives



By the end of this lecture, you will be able to:

- ▶ Differentiate between sampling in qualitative research and quantitative research.
- ▶ Identify approaches to sampling in qualitative research.
- ▶ Identify different types of purposive sampling.



Introduction

- ▶ While quantitative studies often aim to maximise statistical power through the use of as large a sample size as feasible, qualitative studies usually work with a small number of cases that are feasible to study in depth. While subjects/cases in quantitative studies are stripped of their context, the smaller numbers involved in qualitative research allows exploration of the detail and richness of the data collected.
- ▶ Sample sizes for qualitative research vary by technique but are generally small.
- ▶ Qualitative research involves non-probability sampling, where little attempt is made to generate a representative sample.



Introduction

- ▶ The sampling process is iterative and is expected to continue to develop and be refined during the research process.
- ▶ Analysis and interpretation of data collected after initial sampling feeds back to influence sampling methods and decisions regarding sample size.
- ▶ As the research progresses, and the sampling of additional data yields no further themes/ideas/concepts on analysis, the point of data 'saturation' is reached and sampling can cease.



Types of sampling

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Sampling Methods

Probability
Sampling

Non
Probability
Sampling



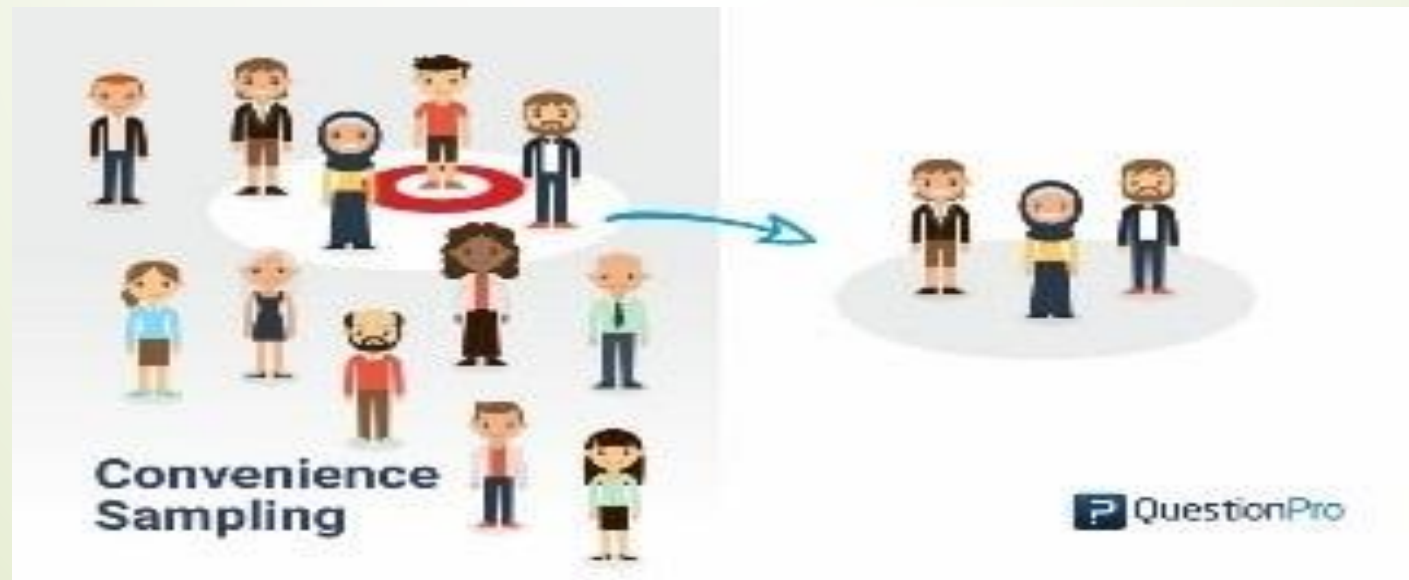
Approaches to sampling in Qualitative Research

- Approaches to sample selection in qualitative research fall under two broad categories;
- **non-conceptually-driven approaches** (convenience and opportunistic sampling).
- **conceptually-driven approaches** (purposive and theoretical sampling).



Convenience sampling

- In this approach, the potential participants/research settings/materials that are most easily accessible to the researcher are sampled.
- Its advantages are that it is less expensive and time- and effort-intensive.



Opportunistic sampling

- ▶ This sampling method involves the researcher taking advantage of circumstances that occur as the study progresses, taking up emerging opportunities for data collection along the way.
- ▶ This flexible approach lends itself to exploratory field research where little is known about the research setting.



Purposive sampling

- ▶ Purposive or judgement sampling is a frequently-applied conceptually-driven approach.
- ▶ It involves the researcher deliberately and purposefully selecting the sample they believe can be the most fruitful in answering the research question.
- ▶ This selection process can be guided by consideration of the variables or qualities of potential participants that affect the contribution they could provide to the study.
- ▶ These variables may be simple demographics such as age, gender and socioeconomic status but can also include other aspects such as specific attitudes or beliefs.



Forms of purposeful sampling

- Maximum variation sampling.
- Deviant sampling.
- Typical case sampling.
- Homogenous sampling.
- Critical case sampling.
- Confirming and disconfirming sampling.
- Stratified purposeful sampling.
- Snowball sampling.



Maximum variation sampling

- ▶ Entails the recruitment of study participants who vary widely on the dimensions of interest with the aim of identifying central themes/elements that hold true across the diverse sample.
- ▶ This allows for multiple perspectives of individuals to be presented that exemplify the complexity of the world.



Homogenous sampling

- ▶ aims to select a group of cases with similar backgrounds and experiences, simplifying analysis and facilitating group interviewing.

- ▶ This sampling approach often is used to select focus groups.



Deviant sampling

- ▶ involves the selection of extreme or outlying cases of the studied phenomenon, such as crises, exceptions or remarkable failures or successes, in an attempt to glean as much information relevant to the research question as possible from each case.
- ▶ For example, in a study of performance of graduate students, a researcher can select the best and the worse students in class and compare the causes of their performances.



Typical case sampling

- ▶ focuses on typical/average cases with the aim of building up a profile of a typical case.
- ▶ General agreement on what constitutes a 'typical' case is required for this approach.
- ▶ The researcher should consult several experts in the field of study in order to obtain a consensus as to what example(s) is typical of the phenomenon and should, therefore, be studied.



Critical case sampling

- ▶ selects cases that will produce critical information with maximum generalisability of information to other cases.
- ▶ Given that the researcher correctly identifies what makes a 'critical case', knowledge gained may be applied to other cases.
- ▶ A simple example would be exploring the understandability of a set of flat-pack furniture instructions with a group of talented engineers. If they're unable to understand them, it's reasonable to assume the general population won't either.
- ▶ if it happened to so and so then it can happen to anybody, or if so and so passed that exam, then anybody can pass.



Confirming and disconfirming sampling

- involves the selection of a mixture of cases that tie in with expectations or findings up to that point in the study and cases which deviate from them.
- The confirming cases serve to add depth, detail and enhance credibility while the disconfirming cases challenge the prevalent narrative and may bring to light alternative interpretations.
- This approach is generally utilised at later stages of a study when preliminary fieldwork has already established what qualifies as a 'confirming case'.



Stratified purposeful sampling

- selects participants from specific sub-groups of the population of interest, enabling easier comparison of the variation across sub-groups.



Snowball sampling (FRIEND OF FRIEND)

- ▶ involves identification of participants by a technique known as 'snowballing' whereby initially identified participants are asked to suggest other possible candidates.
- ▶ This is especially useful when the studied population is hard to access, and/or may not publicly signal that they belong to the group of interest (e.g. drug-users).



Theoretical sampling

- ▶ Theoretical sampling is an approach where sampling decisions are guided by the theoretical framework that underlies the study or by the theory that starts to emerge from the collected data (the latter is especially relevant to grounded theory methods).
- ▶ The goal of sampling is to collect data that either further develops or challenges existent hypotheses. Initial cases selected have similar characteristics and are studied in depth. The researcher then samples outlying cases to see whether the developing hypothesis 'holds up' to these.
- ▶ Once no new insights are derived from further data collection, sampling is ceased. This approach necessitates that data analysis and coding commence while data collection is still ongoing.

CONCLUSION- FLEXIBILITY IN QUALITATIVE SAMPLING

- ▶ A flexible research and sampling design is an important feature of qualitative research,
- ▶ When little is known about a phenomenon or setting, a priori sampling decisions can be difficult. In such circumstances, creating a research design that is flexible enough to foster reflection and preliminary analysis may be a good idea.