

Week 4

# Medical Research

Qualitative Data Collection Methods-2

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# 1. Conducting Observation

• Conducting observations involves a variety of **activities and considerations** for the researchers (Kawulich, 2005):

- **Ethics**
  - **Establishing rapport**
  - **Selecting key informants**
  - **The processes for conducting observations**
  - **Keeping field notes**
  - **Writing up one's findings**
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## 2. Ethics

- The researcher must take some of the **field notes** to reinforce that what the researcher is doing is **collecting data for research purposes**.
  - When the researcher meets community members for the first time, he/she should inform them of the **purpose** for being there and share sufficient information about the research topic. This means constantly **introducing oneself as a researcher** (Kawulich, 2005).
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## 3. Ethics (Continued)

- Another ethical responsibility is to preserve the **anonymity of participants** in the final write-up and in field notes to prevent identification.
- Maintaining ethics in naturalistic observation includes:
  - **Use only if no other research alternative is possible**
  - **Avoid unnecessary deception**
  - **Include a thorough debriefing**
  - **Maintain confidentiality in the research report**
- Researchers should assure the target observed that their **confidentiality would be maintained** and keep this promise. Names, faces, or any identifying information should not be known to anyone except the researcher(s). All records of observation should be handled with **utmost caution**.

## 4. Maintaining Ethics in Naturalistic Observation

- **Do not undertake this type of observation if another research method is possible** to investigate the same problem.
- **Take complete permissions** from those in the research environment who are not a target of the research, such as **school administrators, parents, or community leaders**, and at least inform others who may be affected by the process of research.
- **Explain to the people observed, after observation, why it was necessary** to carry out the research, why they could not be told about the observation, and how their contribution is very valuable. Researchers should patiently address their doubts and queries

**Assure the target observed that their confidentiality would be maintained** and keep this promise. Names, faces, or any information that could reveal their identity should not be known to anyone but the researcher(s). All records of observation should be handled with **utmost caution**, and reports should be made **without any identifications**.

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## 5. Types of Naturalistic Observation

Based on researcher participation:

- **Participant Observation**
- **Non-Participant Observation**

Based on whether researcher is known:

- **Covert Observation**
  - **Overt Observation**
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## 6. Overt versus Covert Observation

- **Overt observation** occurs when participants know they are being observed and are aware of the purpose of the study (**Couchman & Dawson, 1996**).
  - **Covert observation** means participants are unaware of being observed or that the observer conceals the real reason for observing them.
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## 7. Overt Observation

- The observed group is aware of the **presence of the researcher** and that their behavior is being observed.
- The ethnographer **informs participants** about the study and is **transparent** about the research.

## 8. Covert Observation

- Participants are **not aware** of the presence of the researcher or that their behavior is being observed.
  - Ethnography does not inform participants of the study and must balance the **ethical issues of deception**.
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## 9. Gaining Entry and Establishing Rapport

- A key strategy in minimizing the effect of the **researcher's presence on behaviour** is to establish **rapport before starting data collection (Twycross & Shorten, 2016)**.
  - To assist in gaining permission from the community to conduct the study, the researcher may bring **letters of introduction** or information about one's **affiliation, funding sources, and planned length of time in the field**. The researcher may need to meet with community leaders; for example, when conducting research in a school, permission must be granted by the **school principal and possibly the district school superintendent**.
  - For example, if the study involves observing nurses, a first step might be to attend **team meetings or ward handover on several occasions** as a way of getting to know the potential participants and building a relationship with them.
  - **"Hanging out"** is the process through which the researcher gains **trust and establishes rapport** with participants. It involves meeting and conversing with people to develop relationships over an extended period of time.
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## 10. Stages of Hanging Out

- **Moving from a position of formal**

The researcher is a **stranger** who is learning the social rules and language, and making herself/himself known to the community so they begin to teach appropriate behaviour in that culture.

- **Ignorant intruder to welcome**

The researcher begins to merge with the crowd and stands out less as an intruder. This is the **"acquaintance stage"**. The language becomes more familiar, but the researcher may still not be fluent in its use.

- **Knowledgeable intimate**

The researcher reaches the **intimate stage**, where relationships are established to the extent that he/she no longer has to think about what to say. It may involve working with and participating in everyday activities alongside participants in their daily lives (**Kawulich, 2005**).

## 11. Tips for Collecting Useful Observation Data

- Become familiar with the **setting** before beginning data collection.
  - Keep observations **short at first** to avoid becoming overwhelmed.
  - Be honest but not overly technical when explaining the research to participants.
  - Shift between a **wide and narrow focus**, observing individuals, interactions, and overall context.
  - Look for **key words in conversations** to aid later recall.
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## 12. Questions Answered by Observation

Each observation should provide answers regarding:

- Who is observed?
  - What is observed?
  - Where does it take place?
  - When does it take place?
  - How does it happen?
  - Why does it happen as it happens? (**Moser & Korstjens, 2018**)
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## 13. Example of a Research Design Using Observation

### Research Questions

1. How do members of operating teams interact and communicate?
2. What contributes to the communication climates in different operating theatres?
3. Do interprofessional values exist in theatre teams. If so, how do they impact on the behaviour and interactions of operating theatre team members?

### Research Site

Operating theatres in general, vascular and orthopaedic surgery; compare one metropolitan and one regional hospital site.

### Participants

Surgeons, registrars, nursing staff Team leaders, theatre technicians, patients.

### Other key personnel

Director of clinical services; director of medical services; theatre manager; patient admissions manager; admissions staff; team leaders of each theatre.

### Methods of data collection

1. Observations (approximately 40 hours in theatre across the two sites);

2. Field memo's
3. Informal conversations with staff in the theatre and/or theatre suite (e.g. change rooms, staff room, corridors etc)
4. Conduct semi-structured interviews to follow up and clarify findings from observations (include questions about medical jargon, differences in procedure amongst team leaders etc)

### Data analysis

Coding of observation notes; field notes (which includes details of informal conversations with staff; analytic memos; recording of personal experiences, context); thematic analysis.

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## 14. Challenges of Observation

- Methodologically, the act of being observed may change the behaviour of participants (often referred to as the **Hawthorne effect**) (**Barrett & Twycross, 2018**).
  - However, most researchers report a process of **habituation**, where after a relatively short period of time, those being observed revert to normal behaviour. As participants grow accustomed to the observer's presence, their behaviour becomes more natural (**Briggs et al., 2003**).
  - The dependability of the process relies on the observer's **understanding and judgment**.
  - The observer may miss a critical moment while taking notes or be distracted by other factors in the setting (**Oun & Bach, 2014**).
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## 15. Samples on Participant Observation Papers (Further Reading)

- Participant Observation by DL Jorgensen.
- Using participant observation in pediatric health care settings: ethical challenges and solutions.
- Do physicians clean their hands? Insights from a covert observational study.
- Tensions in ethnographic observation: overt or covert?
- Some strategies to address the challenges of collecting observational data in a busy clinical environment.

