

# QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

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Qualitative research is a multi-faceted field, defined by different orientations and methodologies that allow for the completion of in-depth scientific investigations surrounding a variety of topics related to a singular reality or multiple realities, and capturing the meaning of subjective phenomena from the perspective of the study participants<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, in order to encompass the multiplicity of the objects of study, qualitative research does not follow one unique model, rather there exists a diversity and richness of approaches, data collection techniques and models of analysis, which can vary depending on the objective of the investigation or the epistemological and theoretical position of the researcher<sup>2</sup>.

In the 1960s (20th century), social and educational problems led to a favorable scene for the growth of qualitative investigation in the social and human sciences<sup>2,3</sup>. Currently, qualitative research has been quite utilized by different social science disciplines, such as anthropology, political science, psychology, and sociology, in addition to diverse professions related to administration, education, nursing, and others<sup>1</sup>. Even though it is a mode of investigation that is more and more employed and accepted, qualitative research has been the target of criticism, contestation, and suspicion by an expressive portion of the hard sciences scientific community<sup>4</sup>. Within positivism, the basis of scientific truth is based on the logical-deductive model, which requires the formulation of “fundamental theoretical propositions,” aimed at reducing the “necessary logical consequences<sup>2</sup>.” On the other hand, within qualitative research, the inductive model tries to propose a “question to reality,” determining the practical procedures that will be implemented to answer it<sup>2</sup>.

Nursing as a historically constructed social practice, with its philosophical and social roots, has tried to understand through qualitative research various unresolved problems left by quantitative research, whose foundations belong to a positivist epistemology. In the health field, in particular in the Surgical Center, the Central Sterile Supply Department and the Post-Anesthetic Care Unit, the necessity to develop research directed toward human behavior – the field of qualitative studies – arose because of the complexity and the

multidimensionality of the sectors, in addition to the technological advancements and the advancements in knowledge. It is “necessary to go beyond the epistemological debate and understand science as a human production, and thus, a result of social relations<sup>4</sup>.” As such, in this century, the qualitative approach has been presented as a more and more widespread alternative in the health field.

Yin<sup>1</sup> highlights five characteristics that define qualitative research:

1. study the meaning of life of people in their everyday conditions;
2. represent the opinions of the participants of the study;
3. include the context in which the people live;
4. reveal existing concepts that allow for the explanation of human social behavior; and
5. use multiple sources for the collection of data.

Thus, the researcher should obtain a deepened panorama of the context being studied, of the interactions of the everyday life of people, groups, communities, and/or organizations. Then, they should work with a naturalist approach that intends to understand phenomena within their own specific contexts of “real life.”

There is not one formal qualitative research typology, because there exist many models and variations that can be followed, such as research-action, case study, ethnography; ethnomethodology; phenomenological study; life history; substantiated theory; narrative investigation; observer-participant study; and others<sup>1</sup>. The research problem and the goals established should determine the methodological design. Many consistent studies that follow the five characteristics mentioned previously are conducted only as “qualitative research” or as a “field study” because they do not fit in any of the particular variants<sup>1</sup>.

The methods used by qualitative researchers for data collection can be diverse, including interviews (open or semi-structured); observations (participants or non-participants); focus groups; questionnaires; document, photograph, and video recording analysis; and other means<sup>5</sup>. In order to deepen the investigation, the researcher associates

two or more methods to the collection of data. The way in which this will occur will depend on the paradigm of the study being adopted<sup>5</sup>.

Scientific criteria were progressively incorporated in qualitative research in the same way that the postulates for positivism; therefore, ethics, rigor, logic, and coherence are requirements in both quantitative and qualitative studies<sup>2</sup>.

It is important to remember that qualitative data are open to multiple interpretations, allowing for the inclusion of voices participating in the study, in addition to the research, once the reflections, actions, and field observations performed by the researchers become an integral part of the data collection<sup>5</sup>.

Qualitative studies can be indicated in situations in which relatively little is known about the phenomenon, or in order to obtain new perspectives about known questions or to identify types of concepts or variables that previously could be tested quantitatively<sup>5</sup>. The complementary nature between quantitative and qualitative research was amply debated in the recent past; however, nowadays such structural and analytical complementarity is widely recognized<sup>2</sup>.

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