

How can qualitative research help?



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The research methods we are generally taught in our training



- **Randomised trials**
- **Epidemiological research**
 - Cohort studies
 - Case controlled studies
 - Cross sectional studies
- **Meta-analyses /systematic reviews**

Welcome to the dark side



“Qualitative research draws on an interpretive orientation that focuses on the complex and nuanced process of the creation and maintenance of meaning. It aims to elicit the contextualised nature of experience and action, that are detailed, “thick” and integrative (in the sense of relating individual events and interpretations to larger meanings, systems and patterns)”

(Rice and Ezzy. Qualitative research methods, 2002)

What The???

Qualitative Research



Qualitative research involves disciplined inquiry that examines people's lives, experiences and behaviours, and the stories and meanings individuals ascribe to them. It can also investigate organisational functioning, relationships between individuals and groups, and social environments.

NHMRC 2014

Qualitative Research



- Attempts to understand people's experiences
- Answers questions that can't be answered quantitatively
- These questions are practical, important and relevant to our work

Qualitative inquiry in medicine



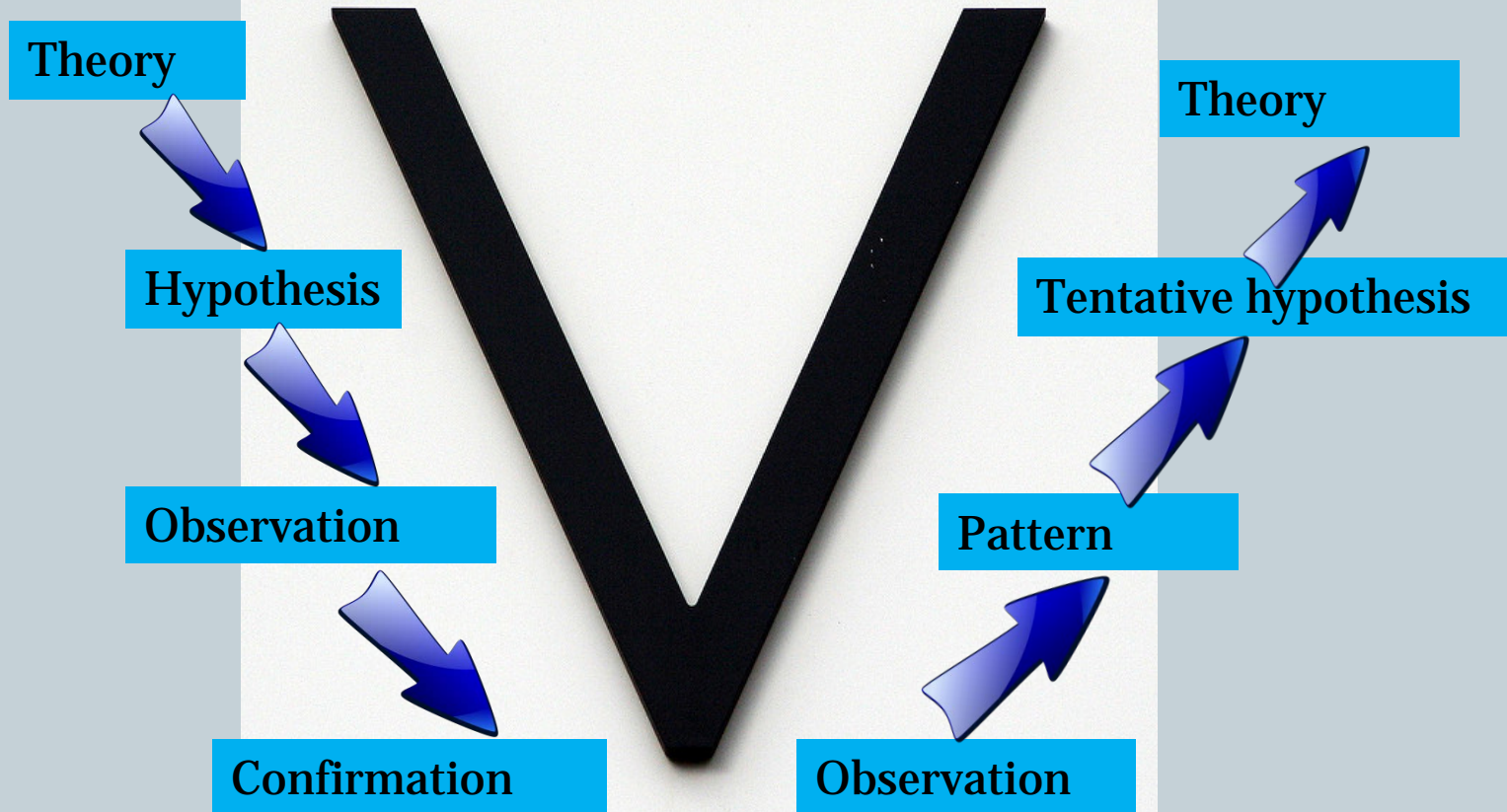
In fact, in medicine, the skill of history taking and the interpretation of those data is a form of qualitative inquiry.



Self Portrait with Dr. Arrias by Francisco de Goya (detail) 1820

Qualitative methods	Quantitative methods
Methods include ; interviews, focus groups, review of documents from types of themes	Surveys, structured interviews and observations and review of records or documents for numeric information
Primarily inductive process used to formulate theory or hypothesis	Primarily deductive using pre-specified concepts, constructs and hypotheses
More subjective. Describes a problem or condition from the point of view of those experiencing it	More objective: provides observed effects (interpreted by researchers) of a program on a problem or condition
Text-based	Number - based
More in-depth on a few cases	Less in-depth but more breadth of information across larger numbers
Unstructured or semi-structured response options	Fixed-response options
No statistical tests	Statistical tests for analyses
Can be valid and reliable: depends on the skill and rigor of the researcher	Can be valid and reliable: largely depends on measurement devices and instruments used.
Less generalizable	More generalizable

Deductive versus Inductive



Some types of qualitative enquiry



- Grounded theory
- Phenomenology
 - Ethnography
- Narrative research
- Case study research
- Discourse analysis

Grounded theory



A ***grounded theory design*** is a systematic qualitative procedure used to generate a theory that explains, at a broad conceptual level a process, an action, or an interaction about a substantive topic.

Grounded theory is inductive research, "grounded" in the data from which it was developed.

Interviews are ***coded***, that is data is broken into conceptual components.

The next step involves ***theorizing***, where careful consideration is given to each concept and how it might be related to a larger more inclusive concept.

Once coding categories emerge, the next step is to link them together in theoretical models around a central category that hold everything together.

Phenomenology



Phenomenology describes the "subjective reality" of an event, as perceived by the study population; it is the study of a phenomenon.

Evidence from phenomenological research is derived from first person reports of life experiences.

Some questions that could be potentially answered using qualitative research.



- **What are the negative experiences of people submitting to medico-legal assessments? (phenomenology).**
- **What factors provoke anger among patients/clients in the medico-legal environment (grounded theory)?**

Some tools used in qualitative research



- Interviews
- Participant observation
- Focus groups
- Records, texts, documents, visual methods

- Purposive sampling
- Snowballing

Some approaches to analysis



Beware – this is the hard bit.

- Transcribing
- Coding (Nvivo can help)
- An iterative, interpretive process
- Thematic analyses

Common criticism of qualitative research



Subjectivity (lacks reliability and validity)

“Soft” (lacks rigour)

Doesn't publish well

The editorial team of *Occupational Medicine* believes there is value in introducing a mix of qualitative with quantitative research to the journal. Quantitative research excels at summarizing large amounts of data and reaching generalizations; qualitative research excels at telling the story from the participants' point of view, providing rich detail that sets results into their human context. As a journal, ***we seek to encourage submission of high-quality qualitative research.*** We encourage researchers in the occupational health field, and undertaking qualitative research, to consider *Occupational Medicine* as a route to the dissemination of their work.

(Wynn and Mooney, 2009)

Validation of qualitative findings



- **Triangulation**
- **Member checking**
 - **Dual coding**
 - **External audit**

Summary



- Often poorly understood by doctors trained in quantitative methodologies
- Complementary to quantitative research
- Has the potential to answer highly relevant questions that otherwise cannot be answered
- Can be undertaken with low cost and is potentially accessible to relatively new researchers.
- Great fun and surprisingly illuminating.

