

# Chapter 14

## Exploring the Depths: Qualitative Research in Psychology

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### ABSTRACT

*Qualitative research in psychology offers a comprehensive understanding of individuals' experiences, perspectives, and emotions, providing in-depth insights into human behaviour. This approach focuses on the quality and depth of data collected by researchers through interviews, observations, and focus groups. By cultivating inclusivity and self-awareness, participants can express their perspectives, leading to a more profound understanding of human behaviour. Although it has its limitations, such as researcher bias and challenges in generalising findings, it plays a critical role in enhancing our comprehension of psychological phenomena and developing effective interventions and treatments. This chapter delves into the use of qualitative research methods, including interpretative phenomenological analysis, thematic analysis, and Foucauldian discourse analysis.*

### INTRODUCTION

Qualitative research is a comprehensive term that covers various research methods, each with its own distinct epistemological assumptions (Petty et al., 2012). It involves exploring and understanding human behaviour and experiences through non-numerical data, such as interviews, observations, and textual analysis. These procedures

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are based on different theoretical approaches, such as social constructionism, ethnomethodology, hermeneutics, symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, and psychoanalysis. These approaches offer valuable insights into the social, cultural, and psychological realities experienced by individuals or groups (Flick et al., 2004). The aim of qualitative study is to describe and explain events and experiences, rather than make predictions, and to uncover rich and detailed insights into the subjective interpretations and meanings individuals assign to their experiences. Qualitative researchers engage in the comprehensive examination of individuals within their natural settings, encompassing diverse environments such as educational institutions, residential dwellings, medical facilities, and beyond, where conditions are constantly changing and interacting. The participants' interpretations help in this process. As a result, qualitative research cannot predict outcomes (Willig, 2010). Qualitative methods are crucial for conducting social science research, particularly in the field of psychology. These techniques include thematic analysis, action research, conversation analysis, discursive analysis, ethnography, psychoanalytic approaches, the descriptive phenomenological method, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), Foucauldian discourse analysis, narrative inquiry, Q methodology, memory work, and grounded theory. Each approach provides unique perspectives and tools for comprehending human behaviour and experiences. Thematic analysis identifies patterns and themes within qualitative data, whereas ethnography involves immersing the researcher in the culture or community being studied. Grounded theory enables the development of theories directly from collected data, facilitating the exploration of new ideas (Eatough & Smith, 2017).

In qualitative research, it is essential to collect data through participant-led or bottom-up techniques, which focus on the meanings and perspectives generated by the participants. There are four primary methods for collecting such data: semi-structured interviews, participant observation, diaries, and focus groups. These methods possess a remarkable degree of flexibility and openness, thereby enabling the acquisition of a wide spectrum of insights generated by the participants themselves. Semi-structured interviews afford participants the opportunity to articulate their thoughts and experiences in their own verbiage, thereby yielding a wealth of intricate and nuanced data. Participant observation involves immersing oneself in the participants' environment, which provides a profound understanding of their behaviours and interactions. Diaries offer unique insights into participants' daily lives, while focus groups encourage group discussions, allowing the exploration of different perspectives and collective insights. In qualitative studies, it is crucial to collect naturalistic data, which requires coding, summarization, categorization, or reduction at the point of collection. The verbatim transcript of a participant's speech is not a complete representation of their real-time performance. The fundamental objective of data collection is to construct a comprehensive account of participants'

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