

Qualitative Research in Social Work

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0.1 The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the nature and basic methods of qualitative research to social work students and novice researchers who plan to use qualitative research in their own field of study. First, we explain the nature and philosophical backgrounds of qualitative research in social work. Second, we describe how to conduct research using a qualitative study as an illustration. Third, we discuss how to collect, analyse, and display qualitative data. Fourth, we outline the quality of qualitative research. Finally, we discuss some of ethical issues pertaining to qualitative research.

Section 1: Characteristics of qualitative research

1.1 Qualitative research can be defined as "multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 2). If you feel that this is too vague, it is probably because what this term means is too various. To illustrate this concept, we will describe the characteristics of qualitative research. Because many authors have pointed out many different characteristics, and because it is not possible to summarise them all in such a small space as this, we will discuss only three that are regarded as important, especially to social work students.

• Meanings from the inside

1.2 Qualitative researchers attempt to understand meanings that people give to their deeds or to social phenomena. In other words, researchers see people from the inside. For example, when you conduct interviews with users of a residential care home for people with physical disabilities, you will have pictures of how they feel about their ordinary lives in the house. How do they think of staying or

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