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Issues in Qualitative Research: A Review and Analysis

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ABSTRACT

There are two types of approaches in research namely, quantitative and qualitative. Although quantitative research is assumed to be more systematic, scientific and empirical, but a deeper understanding of the data can be gained through the qualitative researches only. However, qualitative research doesn't have any systematic or precise method of data collection or analysis. It is based on the researcher's understanding of the subject. This creates confusion in those researchers who are less experienced with qualitative research. This article discusses the hurdles and dilemmas that researchers might face while conducting qualitative research and tries to answer these dilemmas in best way possible. This article is a comprehensive overview of researcher's own experience, discussions with colleagues and professors, and some scholarly writings. Subsequently, the article also paves the way for further suggestion for future research.

In past few decades there is an increasing trend in qualitative researches in the field of psychology which not only focus on pure knowledge and theory formation but also aims to find solution. But still in most Universities in India and many scholars tend to stick with those research that help in establishing facts with certainty. No doubt that course of many universities in India focuses on teaching research methodologies that can help students to collect data objectively and to keep a safe distance from subject so that researcher's own emotional or mental state doesn't affect data in any possible way. This might be important in learning the important tools and methods for research but it in no ways help student to learn how to empathize with others and how to have a solution focused approach rather than a problem focused approach, which is the core of psychology. Hence in some way such research drags researcher away from the core of psychology. The research which occurs in a natural setting and allow researcher to get in-depth information by getting himself involved in research (Creswell, 2009) is the need of the time.

Curriculum of most Indian universities include theoretical account of psychologists based on west. There is less or no focus on Indian people who have their own different type of experiences rooted in their cultural web and constellations. Although everyone is unique and have different wishes, desires, experiences, culture and born in different era, that makes a unique combination to make a person unique and in order to understand someone, all these

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factors must be taken into account, but still, I think those who share a particular culture or history might share at least something between them. And hence to construct a proper image of a person's psyche, his experiences should be studied by taking into account his culture and socio-historical era. Not just the person's own experiences shape his or her psyche but also the experiences of their parents which pass on intergenerationally. I remember some of the cases described by Erikson in his work, where he explained how parents' experience of Nazi doctrine pass on to their children who were never exposed to this doctrine (Erikson, 1994). Although these children never had the chance to absorb the ideas of Nazism but still when they grew, they had many ideas similar to Nazism because this ideology was there in the minds of their parents even if they disliked it but still indirectly the way daily discourses take place between family members at dinner table or in living room might have had its way indirectly to the mind of child. All this get inculcated in their child's head unconsciously. They learn from such experiences about what is expected of them and what is right and wrong from the perspective of their community and their parents. They learn to see and hear from the perspective of their community and eventually start doing what they think would be right as per the norms of community. So, while constructing a psychoanalytical sketch of someone, we need to devote enough time and attention to his social, cultural, political and historical background. While listening to our participant it is necessary to understand where they are coming from. When we hear words without understanding the context, they become meaningless as they were embedded in person's experience so deep that they don't have the same meaning without the context.

Empathy as a listening method

An important quality in qualitative research is empathy, which remains something that people can't learn from textbooks. It is something comes from experience. Those who think of it as a clinical method such as Kohut, has explained it as a method in his book. Empathy as much as I understood from my readings and limited experience, is something that helps one to understand the other person. It is like seeing the world from other person's perspective but still maintaining a degree of separateness and being aware of one's own position(Parks, 2015). But it becomes hard to dilute with others situation and still being separated when you yourself is in the field talking with people and listening to their experiences. We can't understand or empathize with someone unless or until we live their life because there are so many things we can miss as a researcher no matter how hard we try to put ourselves in their place. There are some experiences we can never understand because we have not lived them and hence don't have first-hand experience on their situation. There is an example from my own recollection. I remember once I watched a video on social media about the accused of Nirbhaya rape case. This video came in the aftermath of their capital punishment declaration by supreme court. The video introduced with the family and neighbours of accused, who were in utmost believe that accused were falsely charged even though all the evidences were against them. I can understand why the family denied the charges but I was shocked about why the neighbours were denying the charges. After some time, I realize that it might be hard for anyone to believe that some guy who lives in your neighbourhood can do such a heinous crime and that too when you know the guy since his childhood. So, I had hard time in understanding the position of these neighbours. I read many articles and interviews of those accused but still can't empathize with the accused no matter how worse situation they were in at the time of their death. But their family and neighbours can empathize with them because they have been living with them since years and this makes it easy for them to understand the perspective of accused while I can't take this position no matter how hard I try because I am an outsider.

These very basic questions sometimes used to conflict me so much about how should I as a researcher and as a psychologist can put my ideas and judgement aside while serving those who are or might be in the same situation of accused. Do I have to empathize with them? And how can I not impose my feelings on them? How to stay neutral while also trying to connect with person? Is it okay if I as a person who has lived in a certain community, certain era, have had certain experiences and ideas about morality and ethics, put all these factors together and project them on research subject? To what extent should I stay neutral and how? To what extent can I let my feelings and emotions flow free while listening to other's experience and when to restrict them? These inquiries are very common for new researchers which can be answered through experience. For a better understanding of empathic listening, one can read Simona Rodat's work on "Empathy and Active listening in the Humanistic Social Work" which is a marvellous writing to understand empathetic listening.

Making periphery as the centre of focus

Research is more about serving those who are not in the centre, who lives on the periphery and who are marginalised. A researchers' focus shouldn't be on those only who forms the majority but on those also who lives in periphery and hence reversing the trend of taking those as your research subject who belongs to lower socioeconomic strata (Hale, 1991). To bring them in limelight who are not getting attention of mainstream. Marginalised who are on the periphery and marginalised who are in the centre but still being neglected should be the one to get attention. Moving from centre to periphery has given voices to those who are marginalised and often neglected in academic settings(Hill Collins, 1990). But this poses many questions about how to feel with them when you are not one out of them. No matter what you wear or which language or dialect you speak, still somehow, they don't accept you especially if they know your actual identity. Another major question is how can a researcher decide that who is in centre and who is living in periphery. Sometimes even those who are in centre can be the one not getting the platform to raise their voice, so it is difficult to decide.

The extent of self-disclosure

Recently I read about a controversy regarding to what extent our self should be exposed to the participants, in which the researcher didn't exposed about her father's professional involvement in counterinsurgency in Kashmir while conducting research with Kashmiri participants (Fazili, 2022). Many scholars raised question regarding the ethics of research and safety of participants. This poses many questions in my mind about which information can be shared with informants and is there any ethical principle declaring the extent of self-exposure of researcher to participants. In my opinion all that information should be shared with participants which can relate with the position of participants or may somehow affect them emotionally, mentally or politically especially in areas like Kashmir. But still there remains a question about who will decide what relates with participant's interest and what not. Such decisions should be left to researcher's understanding of participants' interest.

Continuing with the original objectives

Another issue in qualitative research is that researcher often forget about the original aim they had when they started research. Because of long research durations researchers often get exhausted and they get distracted from the original aims and objective of research. This exhaustion dries out their interest and all that remains is aimless research, which they want to end as soon as possible. This stage can occur to anyone no matter how motivated they are for their research. But to bind with the original objectives becomes necessary. Sometimes, the research which was started with the aim of solving the problems of community becomes research of just fact finding. A community which is living on margins, when they and their

problems get identified by the researcher, they expect that their problems will get solved because someone at least is acknowledging that they have problems. But if they feel their problems are intact and they are not taking them anywhere, they might feel that their problems were used to glorify researcher's own profile. Which can in turn reduce their cooperation with researcher or in further researches. Some vulnerable sections of society maybe a rape victim, acid attack survivor, juvenile criminal, prostitute or abused and neglected trans person, who expects their stories to be heard, can get a voice through such researches. But the actual intention should be to only give them the safe and secure space to raise voice and not using their voice to glorify own profile.

Many times, researcher assumes that they are giving the voices to others, while the participants may ask for creating a secure space where they can speak for themselves. If a researcher thinks that he is giving voice to those who are voiceless then it is a misconception because they already had the courage and voice to speak, but all they lack is the space where they can speak (Roy, 2004). So, the intention of a research is to give the stage to those who are not being heard.

Sometimes the time dimension can become restriction. It often happens that researcher have limited time to complete their research due to funding and stipend. But the extra time you give to a participant helps in long term. It helps in developing the relationship between researcher and participant which makes them believe that researcher is not an outsider person. This rapport establishing process is very necessary not only for data collection but to get researcher more participants.

Dialogue rather than monologue
As research process continues, the relationship between researcher and subject grows. It becomes more dialectical and the flow of conversation becomes two sided. With the gradual increase in relationship of researcher and subject, there can arise a state of transference also. Apart from the transference, many times it becomes difficult for researcher also to maintain his position of a researcher. To reach a level where participant can freely tell his experiences, researcher need to get along with participants and for that it is necessary that communication flow should be both sided(MacInnis & Portelli, 2002). Before the participants, a researcher should share his own story and experiences to invoke their stories and experiences. Research process and data collection should be more about communication, about sharing narratives and experiences rather than asking questions, interviews and probing (Oakeley, 1981).

A researcher needs to hear what others have to say(Amalia et al., 2014), rather than imposing one's own ideas, judgements and experiences on others. A researcher should know his own limitations. Sometimes when a person explains his feelings, researcher can interpret them with their own knowledge of psychological theories. This phenomena of "I know best" occurs to most of the new researchers which with experience can be overcome. Sometimes researchers start interpreting other's experiences in arbitrary manner with presumption that they know best for participants, which can leave participants with bad experiences with researcher. This not only bias the research result but also restrict participants to further participate in other future researches. They expect researcher to help them resolving their problems but if they feel like they were just used, their faith and trust can be dried up. Several times, many researchers left without feedback, giving them hopes initially that their problems are being addressed and through the research they can get needed attention which

heightens their hope but then not getting their voice listened they feel like betrayed. And this decreases their cooperation with other researchers.

Participation of research subjects in deciding goals of research
As the main purpose of a research is to create solution for existing problems, hence the research should involve those too in the process whose problems are being addressed. A researcher himself can't describe the goals and process of a research alone. Only with the help of participants, a researcher can decide what are the goals that are to be achieved and how will the research proceed. Participants should be the one to decide what goals they want to achieve, what and how they want research to process. As Tandon said that such practices are evidence from the ancient times that people worked together to understand their world and goals they want to achieve(Tandon, 1988). Mostly researcher take up leadership position and they themselves start deciding what is good or bad for participant's welfare. In such cases researcher should let either participants decide on their own or take help from participants to know their point of view and their expectation from researchers.

Listening to Morpheme over phoneme
Also, another thing to remember is that participants have their own connotative meaning to words they say. When a researcher comes from a different background than participants, their language even if same, can have many words which might be similar phonemically but not semantically. Any term which may have some other meaning for you, can have completely different meaning for participant, and if researcher imposes his own meaning to the terms, it can change the researcher's whole understanding. So, interpretation should be done from participants' perspective not from the researcher's perspective.

If a researcher works with participants honestly and give his best, then good words spread about him which further help him in getting connected to more and more people. This honesty and truthfulness can help them in establishing rapport and participants would share more intimate and personal experience with researcher which they otherwise wouldn't share.

Stepping down from authority position
When a researcher is on his way for data collection, he is seemed more as an authority figure rather than as a person who can have his own experiences too. Most of the time participants assume that researcher is someone who is an authority and can only instruct but this position of researcher as of an authority should be break because this position can create barriers between researcher and participants. So, a researcher should step down from his position as an authority and try to live the experiences of ordinary as they have lived them. Only then a researcher in true sense can know their experiences. For example, a researcher who is doing research with a tribe, he has to give up all his presumptions and should participate in their rituals and customs as they do. He should share their food, should celebrate their functions with them and should understand the symbolic meaning behind their rituals. To mould with them this is necessary that a researcher put aside all his assumptions and stereotypes he has collected from outside world and just collaborate with them.

CONCLUSION
Research should acknowledge that researcher is also coming from earth and is also impacted by the subjectivity of his culture, society, family and community. These factors should be acknowledged by a researcher so that he doesn't impose his feelings, judgements, and emotions and understanding on participants. He should be aware with the limitation of his knowledge and should understand that his knowledge is not universal but specific.

Most of the time researchers are focused on looking for pure knowledge, which is important for theory formation. But if research just find and formulate theories but does fail to apply those theories, then this research would be of no use. So theoretical research is important but along with that their application is also necessary. With the researches finding theories only, they should focus on finding solution also.

When a researcher goes to field, he beforehand collects all the knowledge regarding his research. But this in no way helps him in getting the actual experience of participants. If he wants to know their true experiences he has to step down from his position of expert and mould with participants to become a vulnerable participant just like other participants (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). This way they can feel close to him and he can connect with others to collect data.

Even though researcher meet and make new acquaintances during research period, these acquaintances sometimes can stay forever. Maybe you can find a friend in them. Such connection stays even when research ends.

When we work with someone who has had traumatic experiences, it becomes necessary to understand what they are saying through words and beyond words. Many times, the emotions, expressions, pauses, silences conveyed aside of words are stronger indicator of person's inner world. By listening to the silences, one can know what words can't tell. It is necessary especially when the participant comes from a vulnerable population or have had traumatic experiences in past which can't be described by just words.

These thoughts and questions arose in my mind when I indulged myself with research related readings and reflected upon class discussions. I think the more we question, the more understanding we develop. I learned some takeaways also which I have mentioned already. Some questions posed above are mere the matter of experience and time. And such questions are necessary to navigate through the long research period.

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Conflict of Interest
The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.