

PATSAFE TOOLBOX No. 7

Key features of a qualitative research question

A qualitative research questions differ from quantitative research questions. Qualitative research questions seek to explore or describe phenomena in specific participants groups, not provide a conclusive statement about effects or causal relations between variables in large populations.

Formulating a good qualitative research question is important because:

- ❖ *The question determines the data collection method*
- ❖ *The question guides the data collection*
- ❖ *The question provides focus in the analyses of the data*

The following features and conditions characterize a good qualitative research questions

- ❖ *Open formulation (what, why, how and which). These words accentuate the explorative or explanatory focus of the research*
- ❖ *Focus on a single phenomenon or concept that needs to be studied in order to keep focus*
- ❖ *Use words like 'experiences/perceptions/thoughts/feelings/actions' to stress that the research is about collection qualitative data and not numerical data*
- ❖ *Avoid directive/quantitative words like 'impact/effect/extent'*
- ❖ *Specify your study population and setting*
- ❖ *The questions needs to be compact and easy to understand. This helps to keep focus when collecting and analyzing data*
- ❖ *Formulate the problem and relevance before the research question. When these elements are clearly defined, it is more easy to formulate a good research question*
- ❖ *The question can change over the course of the study. Qualitative research is a reflexive process, one in which the researcher adapts their approach based on what participants say and do. The researcher must constantly evaluate whether the question is important and relevant to the participants. As the researcher gains information from participants, it is normal for the focus of the questions to shift*

References

Based on:

Creswell, J. (2009). Research questions and hypothesis. In Creswell, J., *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.

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