

COURSE CODE: PSYC448

COURSE TITLE: COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY

SESSION #4 : Methods of Community Psychology Research

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Course Information

Provide the following information:

Course Code:

PSYC448

Course Title:

Community Psychology

Course Credit

3 Credits

**Session Number &
Session Title:**

Session #4: Methods of Community Psychology
Research

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Session Overview

- Welcome to session 4. In session 3, you learned about the aims and objectives as well as the rationale for community research. There are various research methods available to community psychologists to understand, describe, and explain community behaviour. What particular research methods do community psychologists use? Community psychology researchers employ several types of research methods to understand communities. In this session, we discuss the various methods that may be used to conduct community research. We note the strengths and limitations of these methods.

Session Outline

The key topics to be covered in the session are as follows:

- Notes on Research Methods in Community Psychology
- Features of qualitative research methods
- Qualitative research methods
- Qualitative data analytic approaches
- Features of quantitative research methods
- Quantitative research methods

Session Learning Goals

- The goals of this session are to:
 - Demonstrate the ability to explain the differences between quantitative and qualitative research methods.
 - Demonstrate the ability to discuss some approaches in qualitative and quantitative research methods.
 - Demonstrate the ability to apply qualitative and quantitative research methods in community research.
 - Demonstrate the ability to integrate qualitative and quantitative methods in a single study (mixed methods).
 - Demonstrate the ability to identify some strengths and limitations of quantitative and qualitative research methods.

Session Learning Objectives

- The desired measurable learning objectives students will achieve upon completion of this session are to.
 - Explain the quantitative methods that are used in community research.
 - Describe the qualitative methods that are used in community research.
 - Discuss the importance of using mixed methods in community psychology research.

Session Learning Outcomes

- By the end of this session, you should be able to:
 - Differentiate between quantitative and qualitative research methods.
 - Discuss the common features of quantitative methods of research.
 - Discuss the common features of qualitative methods of research.
 - Explain the main quantitative methods used by community psychologists.
 - Explain the main qualitative methods used by community psychologists.

Session Activities and Assignments

This week, complete the following tasks:

- Log onto the UG Sakai LMS course site:
<http://sakai.ug.edu.gh/XXXXXXXXXX>
- Watch the Videos for Session 4 – Methods of Community Psychology Research.
- Review Lecture Slides: Session 4 – Methods of Community Psychology Research.
- Read Chapter 4 of Recommended Text - Kloos et al. (2012). *Community Psychology: Linking individuals and communities*; pp. 102-133.
- Visit the Chat Room and discuss the Forum question for Session 4.

Reading List

- **Required Text**
- Akotia, C. S. (2014). Community psychology: Moving psychology into the community. In C. S. Akotia & C. C. Mate-Kole (Eds.), *Contemporary psychology: Readings from Ghana* (pp. 163-177). Tema: Digibooks Ghana Ltd.
- Kloos, B., Hill, J., Thomas, E., Wandersman, A., Elias, M. J., & Dalton, J. H. (2012). *Community psychology: Linking individuals and communities*. New York: Wadsworth.
- Nelson, G., & Prilleltensky, I. (2010). *Community psychology: In pursuit of liberation and well-being*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Topic One

NOTES ON RESEARCH METHODS IN COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY



Notes on Research Methods in Community Psychology

- Quantitative and qualitative research methods compliment each other by making up for the limitations inherent in each method.
- The specific method to use in a particular study should be informed by the research questions to be answered or the research hypotheses.
- Integrating qualitative and quantitative methods into one single study strengthens a specific study.
- Context-relevant research approaches strengthen community research.
- Longitudinal research designs provide more insight into community social problems.



Topic Two

FEATURES OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS



Common Features of Qualitative Research Methods

- Qualitative research concerns itself with describing a phenomenon in a detailed way, often from the perspectives of research participants. In other words, the researcher tries to make sense out of the social world and lived experiences of the people he or she is studying. Qualitative methods are very relevant for community psychologists in that their strengths are complementary to those of quantitative research.
- Qualitative research methods have long been used in psychology (Stewart, 2000). There are several approaches in qualitative methods, yet these approaches share some important common features. The features are described below:



Common Features of Qualitative Research Methods

- **Contextual meaning:** The central aim of qualitative research is to understand the lived experiences of individuals regarding a phenomenon (e.g. teen pregnancy) within the context of their communities.
- Contextual understanding gives rise to insider knowledge, as it allows research participants to “speak in their own voices” (Dalton, Elias, Wandersman, 2007, p. 99).



Common Features of Qualitative Research Methods

- **Participant-researcher relationship:** The researcher and research participants contribute to the creation of contextual meaning within a personal research relationship. This relationship may be intellectual as well as emotional.
- **Sampling:** Sampling in qualitative research is usually small. There is no minimum or maximum sample size required for qualitative research. The sample to be used must just be enough to answer the research question. The researcher ought to establish a close research relationship with the sample, often recruited from a specific community setting.



Common Features of Qualitative Research Methods

- **Generalisation:** There is less interest in generalizing findings from qualitative research. The important emphasis here is on the meaningfulness of the findings. Any attempts to generalize findings should take into account multiple cases or studies.
- **Listening:** Efforts should be made by the researcher to do away with his or her preconceptions and to understand research participants from their own point of view or from their setting. The researcher should be a good audience by listening attentively and by asking open-ended questions that enable participants to have the freedom to express themselves in ways that make them comfortable.



Common Features of Qualitative Research Methods

- **Reflexivity:** Researchers are obliged to declare their interests, values, and preconceptions to their interviewees and in their research report. This helps to clarify potential biases and assumptions that may attend the research findings.
- **Thick descriptions:** Interviewees are required to provide the researcher with “thick” descriptions of their personal lived experiences (i.e. text data). Thick descriptions suggest that the experiences so described should be detailed so as to have a realist touch.



Common Features of Qualitative Research Methods

- **Member checking:** A good qualitative research requires that research participants are given the opportunity to verify whether their descriptions of their experiences were well captured and interpreted by the research. Therefore, After collecting and analyzing the text data, the researcher has to give a cross-section of the interviewees the opportunity to make this verification before the publication of the research report.



Topic Three

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS



Qualitative Research Methods

- There are various qualitative research methods. Only four of the most common methods used in community psychology are described below:
- **Participant observation method:** This is a type of method where the researcher observes participant behaviour in real life during the data gathering process. In other words, the researcher immerses him/herself in the lives of the people he or she wishes to study. This method can be used to study for example groups that do not necessarily “open” to other people.



Qualitative Research Methods

- In participant observation, a researcher can decide to **disclose** or **reveal** his or her identity, by telling the group who he or she is and why there is the need to be among them or to **conceal** his/her identity. It is important, however, that the phenomenon under study determines whether to conceal or reveal one's identity.



Qualitative Research Methods

- For example, in an attempt to understand how street gangs operate, or how a cult operates, a researcher might use ethnographic method with its attendant **participant observation**.
- Here, the researcher “becomes” a member of the group and gets all the information that is needed. The researcher carefully observes, takes written notes, interviews participants. This method is commonly used ethnography.
- There are some advantages and disadvantages of this method.



Qualitative Research Methods

- **Strengths of participant observation:**
- The researcher-observer, by virtue of his or her participation in the community life, knows the context well and can describe it vividly.
- Because the observer participates in the community life, it enhances a healthy community-researcher relationship.
- The researcher-observer can obtain thick descriptions of community life because his or her insider knowledge of community life.



Qualitative Research Methods

- **Limitations of participant observation:**
- Because the researcher-observer focuses on only one community, the study findings may not be generalised beyond the sample.
- The researcher may deal with only select few people in the community. Thus, his or her research report may not be representative of the dynamics of the setting and diversity.
- There is a conflict when a researcher plays both the role of an observer and a participant. This may create an ethical problem.



Qualitative Research Methods

- **Ethnography method:** This method is similar to participant observation, but mostly used by anthropologists. Its purpose is to gain an understanding of how people view their own experiences regarding a phenomenon. It allows participants to use their own language to describe their experiences. The researcher takes a stance of ignorance in the community.
- Because the researcher has to live in the community and while observing community life as part of the data collection process, its advantages and disadvantages are similar to those of participant observation.



Qualitative Research Methods

- **Qualitative interviewing method:** Individual interviews are popular methods in community psychology. Interviews are usually open-ended and may be semi-structured to allow participants to describe their experiences using their own words. These interviews may be tape-recorded or may be documented via note-taking for analysis.
- These are usually **personal** or **in-depth** interviews in which the researcher engages the participant in a one-on-one conversation in an attempt to have an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study.



Qualitative Research Methods

- There are usually **personal** or **in-depth** interviews in which the researcher engages the participant in a one-on-one conversation in an attempt to have an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study.
- For instance, a researcher studying **domestic violence** may interview on a one-on one basis persons who have experienced this phenomenon in the community. The researcher may go with a semi-structured interview guide or decide to leave the questions very open.



Qualitative Research Methods

- **Strengths of interviews:**
- It is flexible means of exploring a phenomenon of interest.
- It helps to structure data collection in a more standard way compared with participant observation.
- It helps to preserve interview data because the interview is recorded, preserving participants' actual words.
- The interviewer can develop a healthy working relationship with research participants and the setting.



Qualitative Research Methods

- **Limitations of interviews:**
- Due to the small sample size used in in-depth interviews, findings from interview studies cannot be generalized to the population.
- Interviews could also be time consuming.
- Interviews may also be expensive because tape-recorders and computers are required to record and to code the text data.



Qualitative Research Methods

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Qualitative Research Methods

- **Focus group discussion method:** Focus group discussion (FGD) is an interview with a group of people. The purpose of FGDs is to elicit discussion among group members to get an understanding of an issue (e.g., a lived experience).
- In FGD, the unit of analysis is the group, whereas in a individual interview, the unit of analysis is the person. The researcher usually plays the role of a moderator or a facilitator by leading the discussion.



Qualitative Research Methods

- In the example on domestic violence in a community, a researcher can organize a focus group discussion where groups of people (usually between 6-12 persons) participate in the discussions rather than individuals.
- For example, participants in a focus group, if possible, should be similar in age, socio-economic class, gender, occupation, etc. If this is not done, some members of the group might refuse to contribute during discussion



Qualitative Research Methods

- **Strengths of FGDs:**
- FGDs allow for a greater access to shared (group) knowledge than personal interviews.
- They provide rich and refined opinions on issues, as participants' ideas shape those of others.
- They bring about social interaction among research participants and may uncover behavioural patterns in a setting.



Qualitative Research Methods

- **Limitations of FGDs:**
- FGDs do not allow researchers to learn more about individual participants as FGDs aim at unpacking “group” understandings of an issue.
- They are expensive to organise because participants from different places would have to converge at one place for the discussion.
- Getting a date, time, and venue that suit everyone may be challenging.
- A major limitation is that those who are not vocal may not talk in the group and therefore hide their rich knowledge/experience from others.



Qualitative Research Methods

- **Case study method:** The case study method can be applied to organisations or to a community. It can also be applied to an individual in a particular community setting. They involve studying a specific case in detail. They can help bridge qualitative and quantitative methods.
- Case study researchers may also use information from **archival** sources to study communities. Thus, a researcher using this method might, for example, use newspaper stories, policy documents, and minutes of meetings to gain an understanding of the community.



Qualitative Research Methods

- **Network analysis method:** It refers to analysing various forms of network to get an understanding of a particular issue or group. It is a method normally used for investigating sensitive, difficult-to-reach populations (e.g. drug users, HIV patients, prostitutes, etc.).
- Researchers can get to know key issues about the population first hand (formative research).
- This first hand information can then be used for a subsequent large-scale study.



Qualitative Research Methods

- **Strengths of case studies:**
- Case studies provide in depth study of a single person, community, or a place.
- They are useful for understanding the interconnectedness among the social, cultural, and community issues.
- They can be used in longitudinal designs.

- **Limitations of case studies:**
- There is focus on a single case prevents generalisability of findings.
- Use of archival data may present problems, since the researcher was not part of the team that produced these data.



Topic Four

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS APPROACHES



Qualitative Data Analysis Approaches

- **Data analytic approaches:**
 - Content analysis (thematic analysis)
 - Discourse analysis
 - Narrative analysis
 - Document analysis
 - Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA)
 - Grounded theory (theoretical sampling & constant comparison)



Qualitative Data Analysis Approaches

- **Data analytic approaches:**
 - **Manual coding:** It involves the use of paper and pencil for coding text data.
 - **Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS):** It involves the use of software to code and analyse text data. Some examples of available software are as follows:
 - (a) Atlas.ti
 - (b) Nvivo



Topic Five

FEATURES OF QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH METHOD



Features of Quantitative Research Methods

- **Measurement:** Standardised questionnaires are the main measures for collecting quantitative data on study variables. The questionnaire can be administered using a cross-sectional or a longitudinal research design.
- **Numbers are data points:** Unlike qualitative research where the text is the data, numbers (numeric values) constitute the data generated from the participant responses on the measures. The aim here is to find between-group and within-group differences in test scores as well as relationship between measured variables.



Features of Quantitative Research Methods

- **Cause and effect.** Quantitative research provides opportunities for establishing cause-and-effect relationship, especially using experimental approaches. Correlational data are used to test hypotheses about relationships only but not causal hypotheses such as A causes B. Correlation is not the same as causation.
- **Generalisation:** Quantitative research provides opportunities for the generalization of findings, if appropriate sampling techniques and sample sizes are employed.



Features of Quantitative Research Methods

- **Hypothesis testing:** Doing research using quantitative method also requires hypothesis testing. A researcher would therefore formulate hypotheses and test them on the field or in the community.
- **Objectivity:** The researcher using quantitative method is expected to be objective in whatever he or she does. That is, there should not be any element of subjectivity when doing quantitative research.



Topic Six

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS



Quantitative Research Methods

- **Survey research method:** They are lists of questions that are answered by research participants. They can be in a paper-and-pencil questionnaires format or an online. They can also be conducted verbally as an interviewer administered survey. Community surveys, using questionnaires, can be conducted on localities or organisations as units of analysis.



Quantitative Research Methods

- **Strengths of surveys:**
- They offer a large sample size which enhances generalizability of study findings.
- They are useful for assessing variables that cannot be manipulated in experimental designs.
- **Limitations of surveys:**
- They rely on previous knowledge to target variables for study and provide knowledge that is “decontextualized”. That is, they don’t include knowledge on community contexts, settings, and cultures.
- They can be expensive because they use large sample size.



Quantitative Research Methods

- **Correlational research method:** This allows one to examine the associations or relationships between two or more variables in their natural environments. They are usually descriptive in nature and do not contain active manipulations of the variables under study.
- For example, a community psychologist may be interested in studying the relationship between poverty and academic performance. This can be done by using the correlational method.



Quantitative Research Methods

- Also, a researcher may want to study whether high education and income level are related. One can use the correlational method for such a study.
- The strengths and limitations of correlational research are similar to those of survey research.



Quantitative Research Methods

- **Experimental research method:** This includes a class of designs and measurement procedures which allow a researcher to manipulate independent variables with the aim of establishing cause-and-effect relationship. There is always a treatment group and a control group.
- However, a true laboratory experiment cannot be conducted in the community, where community researchers collect data. There are some methods that are similar to an experiment which are usually used during evaluation of community programmes.



Quantitative Research Methods

- These quasi-experimental designs are as follows:
- **Experimental social innovation:** This is community research that is similar to a classic laboratory experiment. It is usually used when conducting an evaluation on community programmes (or social innovations, policies, or practices).
- The social innovation (programme, policy, or practice) is measured to see how effective it has been. A typical example would be doing an evaluation on a drug abuse prevention programme that has been established in a community.



Quantitative Research Methods

- **Randomized field experiments:** It is the most rigorous form of experimental social innovation. Participants are randomly assigned to experimental and control groups.
- There is first a pre-test of the experimental and control groups before the implementation of a social innovation. Then there is a post-test, where the two groups are expected to differ. Thus, this method achieves all the qualities of an experiment but is done in the community.



Quantitative Research Methods

- The table below describes how we can make use of the randomized field experiment in a study.

- | | Pre-test | Programme | Post test |
|--------------------|---------------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| Experimental Group | No. Of Sticks Smoked = 20 | Yes | No. Of Sticks Smoked |
| Control Group | No of Sticks Smoked = 20 | No | No of Sticks Smoked |

- From the table above, you can see that both the experimental and control groups were smoking equal no. of sticks of cigarette before the program was given.



Quantitative Research Methods

- The experimental group went through the programme (e.g. they might be provided with some knowledge about smoking to increase their level of awareness and some skills that will help them say no to smoking) while the control group did not.
- If at the end of the programme we conduct a post-test and notice that the number of sticks smoked by the experimental group drops from 20 per day to about 12 and yet, that of the control group remains the same, we can conclude that there was a positive effect of our programme on the participants (experimental group).
- Now, what would you say if the number of sticks smoked by the experimental group remained the same at the time of post-test?



Quantitative Research Methods

- **Strengths of experimental research:**
- They help to establish cause-and-effect relationships.

- **Limitations of experimental research:**
- They are very expensive to conduct.
- They produce decontextualized knowledge.



References

- Kloos, B., Hill, J., Thomas, E., Wandersman, A., Elias, M. J., & Dalton, J. H. (2012). *Community psychology: Linking individuals and communities*. New York: Wadsworth.
- Nelson, G., & Prilleltensky, I. (2010). *Community psychology: In pursuit of liberation and well-being*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

