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Data collection methods in qualitative research

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Μεθοδολογία συλλογής δεδομένων στην ποιοτική έρευνα

Περίληψη στο τέλος του άρθρου

The most common methods of data collection in qualitative research are interviews, focus groups, observation, and Delphi methodology. Interviews are used to explore in depth individuals' opinions, experiences, feelings, perceptions, beliefs, and motivations regarding specific issues. Interviews are divided into structured, semi-structured and unstructured, with semi-structured interviews being used more often. Focus groups are a common method of data collection in qualitative research, in which a group of individuals discuss a specific research topic under the supervision, organization and guidance of a coordinator or, in other words, a facilitator. Focus groups are used to extract information in a collective form and find the interpretations behind this information. In addition, focus groups are used to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' views, experiences, and beliefs at an overall level. Observation in qualitative research usually refers to the observation of individuals (and or events) and is the systematic observation of individuals (and or events) to investigate their behaviors and interactions in their natural environment. Observation is divided into (a) direct observation in which the researcher observes the studied subjects without interacting with them in the study area and (b) participatory observation in which the researcher observes the studied subjects on the one hand and interacts with them in the study area on the other, i.e. acts as both an observer and a participant. The Delphi methodology is a method of agreement or, in other words, consensus and aims to find a general agreement of the views of a group of experts on a particular topic. In particular, it is used in research to solve problems, create research hypotheses and set priorities, while the way agreement is determined may vary from study to study depending on the research subject.

Key words

Delphi methodology
Focus groups
Interviews
Observation
Qualitative research

1. INTRODUCTION

The most common methods of data collection in qualitative research in the health sciences are interviews, focus groups, observation and the Delphi methodology with each method having advantages and disadvantages. Researchers choose the most appropriate method, depending on their research question, the information they seek to draw and the available resources, such as time, space, financial resources, availability of participants, etc. In some cases, it is even possible to use more than one method, in order to reduce bias and to draw more valid conclusions. Understanding the data collection methodology in qualitative research is of primary importance for designing and conducting studies in this research field with the least possible bias.[1,2]

2. INTERVIEWS

2.1. Purpose

Interviews are used to explore in depth individuals' opinions, experiences, feelings, perceptions, beliefs, and motivations regarding specific issues. For example, researchers conduct interviews to ascertain individuals' perceptions of racism, the feelings of women who have suffered domestic violence, the experiences of people who use drugs intravenously, etc. Interviews are conducted individually, i.e. only the researcher and the interviewer participate in each interview, and for this reason they are particularly suitable for sensitive and personal issues, in which it is very likely that the participants do not wish to express their views in front of other people but only the researchers. In addition, interviews are appropriate in cases

where researchers know little about the research question, as well as in cases where they are looking for details about the research question from the individual's point of view.[3–5]

The questions during the interviews should aim on the one hand to obtain information to the greatest extent possible and on the other hand to answer the research question of the study. In addition, questions should be open-ended, neutral and understandable, such as "Why did you start intravenous drug use?", "How do you feel about your partner who physically abused you?" etc.

2.2. Types

Interviews are divided into structured, semi-structured and unstructured, with semi-structured interviews being most often used in qualitative research in the health sciences.[6,7]

More specifically, in the structured interviews, the researchers use a questionnaire with predetermined questions and answers, which they present verbally to the participants, who are asked to answer. The purpose of the researchers is not to discuss in depth with the participants the content of the questionnaire and to shape it accordingly, but to identify the points of the questionnaire that are unclear, difficult to understand, incorrectly worded or lead to misinterpretations and misleading answers. Structured interviews are simple, quick and easy, but they do not explore the research question in depth and for this reason they are rarely used in qualitative research, as they do not offer valuable information to researchers.[8]

On the other hand, unstructured interviews do not include pre-existing theories or ideas on the part of the researchers, who have prepared little or no for the interview process and questions. In this case, the interview can begin with a very simple question such as "Can you tell us about your experiences during your hospitalization?", and continue according to the participant's answer. Unstructured interviews are usually extremely time-consuming, lasting even a few hours, difficult and painful for the participants, as the absence of even a few predetermined questions creates confusion and questions about the topic to be discussed. For this reason, researchers use unstructured interviews only when they know very little about the research question, so they can't generate even a few questions to make the interview semi-structured.[2,9]

Semi-structured interviews are the most common choice in qualitative research in the health sciences and include some crucial questions or, in other words, key questions that on the one hand help researchers to more easily identify the most important research areas to approach and on the other hand give both participants and researchers the space to expand and study the research question in greater depth. Researchers with semi-structured interviews guide the participants to a certain extent, thus facilitating them significantly, as they focus on the research question and have the ability to expand, but not completely escape, making the interview unsuitable for drawing conclusions. In this way, the interview is flexible and can lead to finding information that is important to the participants but had not been perceived by the researchers before the interview was conducted. For example, in a study to investigate patient satisfaction during their hospitalization, researchers conducted a semi-structured interview including questions about medical and nursing staff, while during the interviews some patients also referred to paramedical staff (e.g., trauma carriers), so the researchers also included this dimension in their study.[1]

2.3. Procedures

Prior to the start of the interview, researchers should inform prospective participants in detail about (a) the purpose and methodology of the study, (b) the expected risks and benefits, (c) the freedom of choice for participation and the possibility of withdrawing from the interview at any time without negative consequences, (d) how anonymity and personal data will be preserved; (e) the role of the participants and (f) the name and contact details of the researcher to whom participants can contact regarding their rights in the study. In this way, prospective participants have a better understanding of the study methodology and the interview process, increase their trust in the researchers, as well as the likelihood of participating in the study. A prerequisite for participation in the study is the signature of the participants in the informed consent form that ensures the application of the required ethical principles to the study.[2]

Interviews should be conducted in places where there are no external stimuli (e.g. noises, interaction with other people, etc.) that may distract participants from the interview and disorganize their thinking. In addition, the place, date, and time of the interview must serve the participants to the greatest extent possible. In many cases, participants prefer to be interviewed at home, making them feel more familiar and comfortable, leading to a constructive and productive interview, even though researchers have less control over the interview. In addition, researchers must develop a relationship of intimacy, trust, and empathy with participants before the interview begins, which will have a

positive impact on their interaction during the interview.[9]

It should be noted that researchers should always record interviews with a journalistic tape recorder and then record in text form word for word what was said, so as to reduce bias and to have a secure and permanent record of the interviews. In this case, the researchers inform the prospective participants of the fact that the interview will be recorded, assuring them that their anonymity will be ensured. In addition, it is extremely useful to take notes during interviews or immediately after their completion regarding the observations, thoughts and ideas of the researchers, which will help significantly in the data analysis phase.

It should always be noted that a pilot study with a few interviews should always be conducted so that researchers can determine whether (a) the interview schedule is appropriate, (b) the questions are understandable and lead to conclusions, and (c) changes are needed. Once the interview program and the questions are appropriately formulated, the researchers then carry out their study with the participation of all the people who make up their studied population.[1]

The length of an interview varies depending on the research question, the researcher conducting the interview, and the person granting the interview. Typically, interviews last 20–60 minutes and are conducted once with each person, while unlikely they are conducted more than once with the same person in case researchers are interested in changes over time.[2]

At the beginning of the interview, the researchers must inform the participants about the schedule of the interview to follow, so that they can immediately integrate them into the process and make it more natural. In addition, the first questions should be as simple and easy as possible, so that they can be answered without difficulty by the participants, which will create a relationship of trust and mutual support between researchers and participants.

At the end of the interview, the researchers should thank the participants for their time and participation and ask them if they want to add anything else. In this way, the researchers give the participants another opportunity to develop a topic that for whatever reason they did not develop during the interview.

3. FOCUS GROUPS

3.1. Purpose

Focus groups concern a common method of data collection in qualitative research, in which a group of individuals discuss a specific research topic under the supervision, organization and guidance of a moderator, facilitator. Focus groups are used to extract information in a collective form and find the interpretations behind this information. In addition, focus groups are used to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' views, experiences, and beliefs at an overall level. For example, focus groups can be used to investigate (a) the views of health professionals in public hospitals on their working conditions and remuneration, (b) patients' experiences of the health care provided during their hospitalization, (c) the preferences of pulmonologists for the therapeutic treatment of asthma in children, etc.[6,10–13]

3.2. Procedures

The conduct of the focus groups is very similar to the conduct of the interviews mentioned above, but with the decisive difference that each interview is individual, i.e. one person and the researcher participate, while in a focus group a group of individuals and the coordinator participate.[10] Just like in interviews, in focus groups, the coordinators design a preliminary programme for the topics to be discussed before the start, with this programme of course being adapted according to the participants' responses. In general, the questions should be moved from general to specific, and the order of the questions should be in line with the importance of the topics, i.e. the questions on the most important topics should be preceded and the questions on the less important topics should follow. Typically, researchers pre-plan fewer than 12 questions and then tailor the discussion according to participants' responses.[7,8,13,14]

The selection of the individuals who will create a focus group needs special attention on the part of the researchers, so as to avoid mistakes and to have a constructive discussion. There is no "golden rule" for the ideal choice of participants and the diversity of participants in terms of various characteristics, such as gender, age, social level, educational level, experiences, personal character, etc., will always influence the data that will emerge. The aim is for researchers to take this diversity into account before conducting the focus group, so that they can predict to some extent the interaction of the participants and thus the success or not of the discussion. For example, if participants are not comfortable with each other and cannot speak openly about their feelings, opinions, and experiences, then the focus group will fail to lead to valid conclusions. The result will be similar if even some participants are not interested in the research question of the study or cannot develop it.[1,12]

The interaction between both the facilitator and the

participants in a focus group and between the participants is crucial to the success of the discussion. Researchers can choose either a group of people who already know each other before conducting the focus group or a group of people who meet for the first time in the focus group. If the participants already know each other, then the advantage is greater comfort and familiarity that facilitate discussion and free expression. In this case, however, it is possible that the participants share more common experiences and perceptions than a group of people who do not know each other in advance, so that the discussion does not extend much and not enough conclusions are drawn. In addition, participants who already know each other are quite likely not to want to provoke during the discussion by expressing extreme opinions. It is clear that managing a group of people with different characters and experiences is quite difficult and requires special attention and discretion from researchers, who are asked to select the appropriate sample of participants, in order to extract information to the greatest possible extent, without tensions and misunderstandings.[2,15]

The moderator's conversation with the people of the focus group is always recorded with a journalistic tape recorder and in some cases it is recorded with a video camera, and then the moderator records in the form of text word for word what was said, so as to reduce bias and to have a secure and permanent record of the interviews. In this case, the researchers inform the prospective participants of the fact that the interview will be recorded, assuring them that their anonymity will be ensured. It is recommended to use a good quality external microphone to record the conversation, as individual microphones are more affected by the variability in the volume of the speakers' voices. Special attention is needed in the case of video recording, as it usually takes more than one camera to record all participants, while the presence of the people who will carry out the video recording is required at the interview site, which may have a negative effect on the comfort and psychology of the participants. It is noted that it is extremely useful to take notes during the discussion, which will help significantly in the data analysis phase. However, since it is extremely difficult for the coordinator to organize the discussion and at the same time take notes, it is suggested that a second researcher be involved who will observe and record the interaction between the individuals during the discussion and is known as an observer. If an observer participates in the discussion, then the moderator informs the participants about the presence and role of the observer.[1,10,12]

The interview venue should be isolated from external stimuli (e.g. noises, interaction with other people, etc.) that may distract participants and disorganize their thinking. In addition, the location, date, and time of the interview must serve the participants to the greatest extent possible, which is quite difficult in a focus group, as there are several people involved.

3.3. Sample size

The size of the sample is crucial in the conduct of the focus groups and it is preferable to initially invite more people than planned, as it is possible that some invitees will not turn up eventually. In this way, the focus group is held, even if some guests are absent. The ideal number of participants in a focus group is usually 6–8, while the minimum number is 3 and the maximum is 14. It should be noted that with small groups there is a risk that the discussion will not be expanded and that the researchers will not proceed in depth regarding their research question, while with large groups there is a risk that the moderator will lose control of the discussion, create a chaotic situation and some participants will even not be able to express their views.[1]

3.4. Coordinator

The role of the coordinator in a focus group is crucial and although it seems easy, it requires certain complex abilities and skills, and more specifically the coordinator must (a) direct the discussion correctly, not allow participants to completely escape the research question of the study and not participate in the discussion, expressing personal opinions and beliefs that can influence the participants; resulting in the introduction of an bias, (b) be adequately prepared for negative and or critical opinions of the participants on a topic that they consider important, (c) be not prejudiced and accept all opinions, provided that they are not offensive or abusive, (d) be themselves and not pretend, so as to be comfortable and natural, enabling participants to feel the same, (e) facilitating participants in the discussion, without of course guiding them along specific paths, (f) preventing some participants from monopolizing the discussion, thus enabling everyone to express their opinions, (g) ensuring sufficient time for all participants to express themselves, and (h) encouraging participants who express themselves less.[6,11]

It is noted that a coordinator is impossible to be suitable to conduct any one focus group. It is clear that each coordinator has certain special characteristics and specific abilities that make him suitable for one focus group, but not suitable for another. For example, a coordinator who has children may be unsuitable for a focus group with

parents of children with leukemia in order to capture their emotions, as they are quite likely to become emotionally charged and thus influence the conversation.

4. OBSERVATION

4.1. Purpose

Observation in qualitative research usually refers to the observation of individuals (and or events) and is the systematic monitoring of individuals (and or events) to investigate their behaviors and interactions in their natural environment. Observation helps researchers (a) determine how individuals react and interact in specific situations, (b) recognize individuals' behaviors, (c) identify individuals' values, and (d) generate appropriate questions that they could then use to conduct interviews or focus groups. For example, a teacher in the role of an observer may observe his students to determine the students who engage in inappropriate behaviors (e.g., copying during exams), as well as the number of inappropriate behaviors. In addition, a psychologist can observe the reactions and interactions of employees in their workplace, trying to identify the stimuli that lead to either positive or negative behaviors.[7,8,16]

Observation essentially helps researchers understand the world of the participants, while also giving them the ability to triangulate data, i.e. the ability to confirm their findings obtained by another method of data collection, such as interviews or focus groups. For example, researchers can observe a person in their natural environment and determine whether what they say during an interview is true or false. In addition, by observing the participants, the researchers can determine the time they spend on various activities, recognize non-verbal expressions of their emotions that indicate e.g. irritation, joy, frustration, anger, etc., and determine their interactions with other people. The observation method is particularly useful in sensitive and personal matters, where there is an increased likelihood that individuals will not freely express their opinions during interviews or even more so focus groups.[6]

4.2. Types

Observation is divided into (a) direct observation in which the researcher observes the studied subjects without interacting with them at the study site and (b) participant observation in which the researcher observes the studied subjects and interacts with them at the study site, i.e. acts as both an observer and a participant.

In addition, both direct and participatory observation are distinguished into covert observation and overt observation. Hidden observation occurs when the subjects studied are unaware that they are being observed, and it is rarely practiced because of moral constraints, although it is clear that there is an increased likelihood that individuals will change their behavior in a positive direction when they know that researchers are watching them. For example, in a study to observe medical waste management in an intensive care unit, researchers observe and record the behavior of health professionals. It is clear that if health professionals know in advance about the conduct of this study, then they will modify their behaviour in the positive direction, trying to manage medical waste in the best possible way. But if researchers don't inform health professionals about the study, it raises an ethical question about whether it is permissible to monitor workers in their workplace without their consent. For this reason, the hidden observation is rarely applied in the health sciences, although it reduces the bias of a study. On the other hand, in the obvious observation the subjects studied know that they are subject to observation for research purposes, they consent to their participation and thus there is no question of violation of the prescribed ethical principles.[1,8,15,16]

The way in which the researcher will participate in the observation of the subjects studied affects the quality of the data to be collected and the relationships between the researcher and the participants, and for this reason is decisive for the validity of the study.

4.3. Procedures

Researchers must record their observations in text form with a specific and clear methodology. For this purpose, the area in which the observation will take place must first be recorded in detail, ideally by designing the corresponding map in the greatest possible detail. This will make it easier for researchers to recall more details about what they observe in the study area. For example, if in a study the workers of a neonatal intensive care unit are observed, then the design of the unit in the form of a map, where the size of the room, the location of the incubators, the location of the various devices and tools, etc., will make it much easier for researchers to record valid notes with reduced bias.[2,9,17]

After designing the map, the researchers begin to record everything they see and especially anything related to their research question, such as the actions, behaviors, reactions, interactions of the participants, etc. What happened, when, how long it lasted and who participated. Also, researchers should carefully observe and record non-verbal expressions of the emotions of the studied subjects that indicate e.g.

irritation, joy, disappointment, anger, etc. Special attention is required to observe the conversations between the studied subjects, as they should not feel uncomfortable and that they are under strict monitoring because in this case they will not express themselves freely and thus safe conclusions will not be drawn. With regard to conversations, it must be recorded who spoke to whom, when there were pauses, the degree of physical contact with the hands, the distance between the speakers, the posture and eye contact. Researchers need to observe and record as much detail as possible, as it is better to have more data than insufficient data to draw conclusions. Taking photos, after all, helps researchers in some cases to recall details more easily.[7,8,14]

The observation guide is used quite often by researchers and makes it much easier for researchers to record their observations in an organized way, which allows them to then analyze the data more easily. The observation guide is created according to the type and purpose of the observation and enables researchers to focus on the participants' activities that will provide them with the most information regarding their research questions. The most common methods for creating an observation wizard include: (a) Observation at predefined intervals, (b) event sampling, (c) checklist, and (d) event counting. By applying observation to predetermined time intervals (observation), researchers determine, before the start of the observation, specific time intervals in which to observe participants and record their notes.

5. DELPHI METHODOLOGY

5.1. Procedures

The Delphi methodology is a method of agreement or, in other words, consensus and aims to find a general agreement of the views of a group of experts on a specific topic. In particular, it is used in research to solve problems, create research hypotheses and set priorities, while the way agreement is determined may vary from study to study depending on the research subject.[1,5,6,8,18]

As in all studies, in those where the Delphi methodology is applied, the research question or, in other words, the research hypothesis is initially determined. Some research questions that the Delphi methodology could be applied are: (a) How could family and friends help a person with suicidal ideation? (b) What is the appropriate therapeutic algorithm for treating asthma in children? (c) Which research fields in the health sciences should receive priority funding? (d) What are the criteria by which a migraine is determined? (e) How many people suffer from dementia worldwide?

Initially, a researcher assumes the role of facilitator, in order to organize the study and especially the team of experts and the communication with them, which is the first decisive step. The research team determines the experts to be involved in the study, and then the coordinator contacts them and invites them to the study.

The first round of the study is then conducted in which the initial questionnaire of the study is distributed to the experts, so that they can state the degree of importance they attach to each element of the questionnaire on the corresponding Likert scale. In addition, in this case, experts can write anything they want as a comment, explaining for example the reasons for their agreement or disagreement, suggesting new data to be included in the questionnaire, etc.[13]

The researchers then analyze the data from the first round and create the second round questionnaire that includes the data on which there was a discrepancy between the experts in the first round. In addition, the questionnaire of the second round also includes the new data that may emerge from the comments of the experts in the first round. More specifically, the researchers include in the final questionnaire of the study the data declared as important by the experts in the first round, using a predetermined statistical criterion. For example, in a study the predetermined statistical criterion is to include in the final questionnaire the data that in the first round were considered important by at least 80% of the experts. Usually, the questionnaire of the first round includes several elements and in order to avoid fatigue of experts, the questionnaire of the second round includes for review the data on which moderate agreement was found and does not include the data on which very little or little agreement was found. With regard to the previous example, the researchers choose to include in the second round questionnaire the data that in the first round were considered important by 60% to 80% of the experts and not to include for review the data that in the first round were considered important by less than 60% of the experts. Thus, the questionnaire of the second round includes the data that in the first round were considered important by 60% to 80% of the experts, as well as the data that emerged from the comments of the experts in the first round.[8,11,13]

In the second round of the study, the coordinator anonymously informs each expert about the degree of agreement between his answers and the answers of the other experts as a whole, so each expert has the opportunity to revise or not his answers regarding the common data included in the questionnaires of the first and second

rounds, now knowing the answers of the other experts. The researchers include in the final questionnaire of the study the data declared as important by the experts in the second round, using a predetermined statistical criterion. In this case, the selection of the important elements is carried out in the same way as in the first round. It is noted that very rarely a third or even a fourth round can follow, as experts get tired and there are significant losses that introduce significant bias into the study. However, the conduct of a third or a fourth round is the same as that of the second round.

5.2. Selection of experts

Researchers must select individuals who are considered experts to answer a particular research question. The manner and criteria by which experts are selected, as well as the sampling methodology, must be clarified from the outset and always applied without exception. For example, in a study investigating strategies for the prevention of depression and anxiety disorders in adolescents, from the parental perspective, the researchers considered as experts (a) the authors of articles in this research field that they found after a systematic literature review and (b) the clinicians they found in the corresponding electronic database of the medical association.

The type of research question essentially determines the choice of experts in a study. Typically, the experts are health professionals with expertise and experience in the research question of the study. In recent years, however, there has been an increase in studies that do not use health professionals as experts, but use health service users, for example. For example, in a study investigating patients' preferences for treating psychotic disorders, researchers included patients as experts. In some cases, it is also possible to use both health professionals and users of health services as specialists. In fact, in several studies, which include both health professionals and users of health services as experts, a high degree of agreement was found between these two groups.

Selecting experts with different expertise and experience can help to draw safer conclusions, but special care is needed so that they are not included as experts people who are not relevant to the research question of the study. For example, in a study concerning the use of health services by adults, school-age children should not be included as experts, as they constitute a completely different studied population with different experiences and perceptions compared to the adult population.

5.3. Number of experts

Increasing the number of experts in a study applying the Delphi methodology implies an increase in accuracy, but there is no specific methodology for calculating the appropriate number. For example, if 10 experts participate in a study, then each expert corresponds to 10% of the sample and their answers can decisively influence the result, while if 20 experts participate, then each expert corresponds to 5% of the sample and their answers affect the results less than in the first case. A study on quality and safety in healthcare found that the ideal number of specialists was 23, but it was not certain whether this could be generalized to other studies. It should be noted that in the design of a study, the possible departures of the experts must also be taken into account with the development of the rounds where the data of the questionnaire are evaluated. The increase in the number of questions and assessment rounds is related to an increase in expert departures.[1,9,12]

5.4. Development of the original questionnaire

In the first round of the study, the initial questionnaire with data related to the research question is distributed to the experts. The purpose of the researchers is to include as much evidence as possible to cover the research question to the greatest extent possible. To this end, a systematic and analytical approach is needed.

The most important source of data for the initial questionnaire is the systematic literature review that enables researchers to search for appropriate evidence in the existing literature. In this case, the researchers must detail how the systematic review was conducted and the evidence obtained by this method.

The second source of data for the initial questionnaire is the experts. In this case, qualitative research is carried out with a focus group recommended by the experts who will later participate in the Delphi method. For example, in a study to develop guidelines on how to communicate with adolescents on mental health issues, data for the initial questionnaire emerged from both the corresponding literature review and two focus groups that included physicians and mental health service users.[13]

As mentioned above, during the completion of the initial questionnaire in the first round, experts can add new data, which will be evaluated for the first time in the second round of the Delphi method. More rarely, it is possible for experts to add new data during the second round, which will be evaluated for the first time in the third round of the Delphi method and so on. Researchers must evaluate the

new evidence proposed by the experts in a round regarding whether (a) it has already been covered by the existing evidence, (b) it is relevant to the research question of the study, and (c) it has been clearly formulated.

The number of items in the initial questionnaire can vary significantly, and if it is large, it is suggested that the items be grouped into categories or, in other words, topics, in order to facilitate experts.

The evaluation of the questionnaire data is usually carried out on a nine-point Likert scale, while less often a tertiary, five-point or seven-point scale is used.

It should be noted that the statistical criterion to be used in a study to incorporate an element into the final questionnaire must be defined before the study is conducted, be clear and always applied. For example, in a study applying the nine-point Likert scale, researchers predetermine that any item with a median score of ≥7 will be included in the final questionnaire, any item with a median score of ≤3 will not be included in the final questionnaire, and any item with a median score of 3 to 7 will be reviewed. In another study, researchers may opt for stricter dividing limits, such as 2 and 8, instead of 3 and 7. If there are no clear dividing lines in the literature, then researchers are invited to select them in a process that clearly includes their subjective judgment.

5.5. Providing information to experts

When the questionnaire is distributed to the experts for evaluation, then the researchers either provide additional information to the experts to assist them in the evaluation or do not provide them, in which case they seek additional information themselves if of course they want to. Typically, the additional information includes reviews of the existing indication or definitions of defining concepts. The provision of reviews by researchers to experts depends on the availability of reviews and the nature of the questionnaire.[7–9,13]

Usually, the Delphi methodology is applied due to the lack of indication in a particular research question. In this case, therefore, experts are asked to answer the questionnaire according to their professional and personal opinion, as there are no reviews available to read. For example, there were no reviews available in two studies to develop guidelines on how the public can help people who cause self-harm and how to communicate with adolescents who have mental health problems. There are, moreover, cases in which an indication is available, but it is either not complete or is not yet suitable for practical application. In these cases, experts can also rely on the available evidence to estimate, for example, the prevalence of dementia worldwide, while this prevalence varies from country to country. Finally, in some cases experts are asked to agree on certain subjective judgments, so reviews are not appropriate, such as a study in which research priorities were explored.

5.6. Distribution of the questionnaire

The questionnaire is distributed separately to each specialist either by post or, more commonly, electronically, by e-mail. In this way, an important advantage of the Delphi methodology is ensured which is the completion of the questionnaire separately by each specialist without knowing the names of the other specialists and thus without contacting them. In addition, experts do not meet with each other, as could be the case, for example, if a focus group was held during a conference. Thus, the opinions of an expert are not influenced by other experts and moreover he has no qualms or fear of expressing himself freely. It should be noted that e-mail now provides the possibility of conducting studies with experts at a global level, which significantly increases the variability of participants' experiences.

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Μεθοδολογία συλλογής δεδομένων στην ποιοτική έρευνα

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Οι συνηθέστερες μέθοδοι συλλογής δεδομένων στην ποιοτική έρευνα είναι οι συνεντεύξεις, οι ομάδες επικέντρωσης, η παρατήρηση και η μεθοδολογία Delphi. Οι συνεντεύξεις χρησιμοποιούνται για να διερευνήσουν σε βάθος τις απόψεις, τις εμπειρίες, τα συναισθήματα, τις αντιλήψεις, τις πεποιθήσεις και τα κίνητρα των ατόμων αναφορικά με συγκεκριμένα ζητήματα. Οι συνεντεύξεις διακρίνονται σε δομημένες, ημι-δομημένες και μη δομημένες, με τις ημι-

δομημένες να χρησιμοποιούνται συχνότερα. Οι ομάδες επικέντρωσης αποτελούν μια συνήθη μέθοδο συλλογής δεδομένων στην ποιοτική έρευνα, στην οποία μια ομάδα ατόμων συζητά για ένα συγκεκριμένο ερευνητικό θέμα υπό την εποπτεία, την οργάνωση και την καθοδήγηση ενός συντονιστή ή, αλλιώς, διαμεσολαβητή. Οι ομάδες επικέντρωσης χρησιμοποιούνται για να εξαχθούν πληροφορίες σε συλλογική μορφή και να βρεθούν οι ερμηνείες που κρύβονται πίσω από τις πληροφορίες αυτές. Επί πλέον, οι ομάδες επικέντρωσης χρησιμοποιούνται για να κατανοηθούν σε βάθος οι απόψεις, οι εμπειρίες και οι πεποιθήσεις των συμμετεχόντων σε συνολικό επίπεδο. Η παρατήρηση στην ποιοτική έρευνα αφορά συνήθως στην παρατήρηση των ατόμων (ή και των γεγονότων) και είναι η συστηματική παρακολούθηση των ατόμων (ή και των γεγονότων) για τη διερεύνηση των συμπεριφορών τους και των αλληλεπιδράσεών τους στο φυσικό τους περιβάλλον. Η παρατήρηση διακρίνεται (α) στην άμεση παρατήρηση, στην οποία ο ερευνητής παρατηρεί τα μελετώμενα άτομα χωρίς να αλληλεπιδρά μαζί τους στον χώρο διεξαγωγής της μελέτης και (β) στη συμμετοχική παρατήρηση, όπου ο ερευνητής αφ' ενός παρατηρεί τα μελετώμενα άτομα και αφ' ετέρου αλληλεπιδρά μαζί τους στον χώρο διεξαγωγής της μελέτης, λειτουργεί δηλαδή τόσο ως παρατηρητής όσο και ως συμμετέχων. Η μεθοδολογία Delphi είναι μια μέθοδος συμφωνίας ή, αλλιώς, συναίνεσης και στοχεύει στην εύρεση μιας γενικής συμφωνίας των απόψεων μιας ομάδας ειδικών σε ένα συγκεκριμένο θέμα. Ειδικότερα, χρησιμοποιείται στην έρευνα για την επίλυση προβλημάτων, στη δημιουργία ερευνητικών υποθέσεων και στον καθορισμό προτεραιοτήτων, ενώ ο τρόπος με τον οποίο καθορίζεται η συμφωνία μπορεί να διαφέρει από μελέτη σε μελέτη ανάλογα με το ερευνητικό αντικείμενο.

Λέξεις ευρετηρίου: Μεθοδολογία Delphi, Ομάδες επικέντρωσης, Παρατήρηση, Ποιοτική έρευνα, Συνεντεύξεις

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