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# Insights on the development of qualitative research in nursing in India

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## Abstract

Qualitative research is gaining recognition in health care. Health professionals are involved in qualitative research methods to generate evidence. Nursing is part of healthcare and little is known about the involvement of nurses in generating evidence through qualitative research in India. This paper explores the insights on the development of qualitative research in India among nurses thus encouraging the qualitative research among nursing.

**Keywords:** Qualitative research, research, insight, nursing, India.

## Introduction

Qualitative research is gaining its recognition in health care. Health care professionals are involved in research using a qualitative approach to generate evidence (Ritu, 2000). Nursing being the part of healthcare, there is a substantial growth in qualification, research and production of knowledge linked with the research (Maria, Paraizo, Maria, & Leite, 2017). With an increased number of research in nursing, qualitative research has been increasingly receiving recognition and importance in nursing and health care (Miller, 2010).

Qualitative research studies and methods seek to explore the human conditions, phenomenon and process in-depth in view of describing and explaining it. Results of qualitative research are bound to the specific milieu (Cruz, 2017). In a country like India with a diverse culture, religion, qualitative research has a paramount important role in the study of human behaviour and action. With emphasis given to research in the nursing

curriculum, the nurse researchers are interested to look for different research approaches and designs. Attempts have been made by the nurse researchers to use the qualitative approach to understand the phenomenon of health and illness across the lifespan.

Professionals who value the current trends in research and demonstrate the broad range of knowledge in research will be able to deliver effectively to their clients and dedicate to the self-professional growth (Cruz, 2017). We need to hear the opinions and experiences of both from practitioners who implement and recipients (patients) who receive for better understanding, how best certain practices are applied (Rose & Kroese, 2018). There is lot of published research in India on qualitative research from the disciplines of public health and social sciences. However, it is in the emergence phase in nursing and minimal publications are available.

## Authors' experiences in qualitative research:

### *Approaches/ traditions used in nursing research*

Both researchers of this review article are experienced in conducting qualitative research. As a nurse researchers working in India, we have used grounded theory in understanding health and illness of individuals or family. Some of the qualitative researches published are in the areas of the experience of the mothers of children admitted in paediatric surgery (Pai, Bhaduri, Jain, Kumar, & Sethi, 2008); lived experiences of patients with head and neck cancer (Nayak, Pai, & George, 2019); Near-

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Death Experiences (NDE) of Cardiac Arrest Survivors (Alias, Pai, & George, 2015). The studies have adopted grounded theory and phenomenological approach.

#### *Sampling, sample size and data collection methods*

Sampling techniques used were mostly the nonprobability purposive or judgemental sampling (Polit & Beck, 2012). A sample size of the studies were small ranging from six to ten, decided based on data saturation. The individual in depth interviews (IDI) with an interview guide was used to collect the data. Even though Focus Group Interviews (FGD) are helpful in collecting the data, it is being considered by nurse researchers in recent years. The interviews were recorded by using the audio recorder.

#### *Data analysis*

The data were analysed based on the frameworks explained in different approaches. Studies carried out in the 1990s were transcribed and coded manually. With the availability of different software, the nurse researchers started using qualitative software like NVivo and OpenCode. NVivo software programme is produced by QRS international and is used for the analysis of a text, video, audio, image data, interviews and focus group discussion in qualitative and mixed-method research. Open code is a tool developed by ICT services and Epidemiology, the University of Umea for coding the data in qualitative research (open code 4.0 2013). Most of the studies developed a framework of the results that are reported in the publications (Pai, Bhaduri, Jain, Kumar, & Sethi, 2008; Nayak, Pai, & George, 2019; Alias, Pai, & George, 2015).

In the search, we also have come across a few qualitative studies published in reputed journals by Indian nursing professionals co-authored with international authors. A study on parenting burn-injured children in India was conducted. In this study, a constructivist grounded theory methodology was used to discover the process of parenting a burn injured children in India. The data collection technique was through semi-structured individual or family interviews among nine mothers, nine fathers and three grandmothers by using a purposive sampling technique. Data were analyzed through the inductive process and the findings evolved were parenting their burn injured child as a process of "Enduring the Blame" (Ravindran, Rempel, & Ogilvie,

2013). Another qualitative study conducted in North India to acquire the ideas and information of healthcare providers in view of optimizing the education and clinical practices of nurses in caring sick newborn. In this study, a convenient sampling technique was used and data was collected through focus groups and the analysis was through descriptive and thematic content analysis (Deorari et al., 2014). The methodology adopted in these studies also similar those of the authors' experiences in qualitative research.

#### **Bottlenecks in the development of qualitative nursing research in India:**

The nurse researchers were using different qualitative research approaches or traditions. These approaches are from social sciences which are guided by methodological tradition (Teodoro, et al., 2018). Most of the qualitative research methodologies in nursing were derived from the social sciences, mostly by the methods suggested by anthropology, psychology and sociology. In nursing research, using the methods of the social sciences is being debated as nursing problems require solutions for practical problems whereas social sciences research has an understanding of problems of a more theoretical than practical. When the method that is being used in social science are applied to health and nursing research, its goal will be to understand how people behave rather than solving the problems of the daily life of people in their health and disease process (Thorne, 2016). The knowledge on qualitative research used was from the textbooks (Polit, & Beck, 2012) and journals that explained the qualitative research methodology which is mostly from the literature of non-Indian origin. Since the knowledge is coming from various diverse sources leading to dilemma to the nursing researchers in India. Apart from nursing research, in application, most of the practices are based on the teaching done by the seniors. Nurses also practice and use their clinical skills based on their prior experience on making the decision in the clinical (Zhao et al., 2016). Conducting qualitative research among the nursing population may help in identifying the facilitators and barriers of such practices.

India being a country of linguistic, cultural and religious diversity, there are limitations in generalizing the findings of the research. In nursing, the findings of qualitative research may help in the application of

context-specific evidence in the practice. Application of findings from qualitative research method should be highlighted in the nursing curriculum. The research in a higher level of degrees in nursing should be encouraged to undertake qualitative research methods for the dissertation. Issues on standardization of the qualitative research in relation to linguistic, cultural and religious diversity need to be appropriately addressed for nursing research. Policy developers in nursing, nursing administrators and experienced researchers in qualitative research should take an initiative in propagating and conducting qualitative researches to generate the evidence.

#### **Future directions:**

As the nurse researchers are familiar with the qualitative research methodology, we need to reflect on the use of the traditions based on sociology and psychology. There are other qualitative research designs or approaches or types being considered by the nurse researchers that is not associated with any particular design. Descriptions of such types are as follows:

a) Descriptive qualitative approach or design

A qualitative description design can be considered relevant where information is required directly from those experiencing the phenomenon under investigation and where time and resources are limited (Bradshaw, Atkinson, & Doody, 2017). Researchers using this design select what is to be described an experience or event and begin to transform that event or experience. The descriptions in this method are in detail and include interpretation that requires in depth analysis. By doing the descriptive qualitative research, the researcher tends not to penetrate their data in any interpretive depth. Researchers conducting qualitative descriptive studies stay closer to their data and to the surface of words and events than researchers conducting grounded theory, phenomenologic, ethnographic, or narrative studies (Sandelowski, 2000; Polit & Beck, 2012).

b) Interpretive Description

The Interpretive Description is “an analytical, inductive approach designed to create ways of understanding human health and aspects related to the experience of a disease that have consequences for the clinical context and practice

in Health and which are of interest for Nursing researchers” (Sally, Kirkham, & Macdonald, 1997). This methodological referential for the development of nursing research is proposed by a Canadian researcher and the graduate students from the University of British Columbia (UBC). It is applicable to other areas of health - which the author calls “Interpretive Description” (Teodoro et al., 2018).

Interpretive description became a method as there was a need to generate a better understanding of clinical practices in Nursing. The methodological traditions of interpretive descriptions are similar to the social sciences. However, there is a difference in terms of its theoretical objective and rigidity. This design has the capacity to generate meaningful and reliable knowledge in nursing. Nursing studies have used this referential as a basis to interpret the events or experiences (Kalengayi, 2012; Teodoro et al., 2018).

c) Critical theory

Critical theory is used to find the inequality in the nursing and health care system. It is used as a framework to understand the possible practices that result in inequality. Contextual analysis of the phenomenon is emphasised in critical theory by making more coherent from the social point. This theory highlights the need for improving the description of the construction of knowledge and democratic position of knowledge. Research-based on the social situational reality, which is part of daily experience is also emphasized to incorporate onto the professional formation of the discipline and into the research (Mosqueda, Vélchez, Valenzuela, & Sanhueza, 2014).

d) Thematic analysis:

Thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analysing, organising, describing and reporting the themes found in the dataset of qualitative research. This method of analysis enables qualitative researchers to communicate with each other who use different research methods. Thematic analysis is a most accessible form of analysis, especially those who are early in their research career, as it doesn't require detailed technological and theoretical

knowledge of other qualitative approaches. Thematic analysis is relatively quick to learn and easy to grasp for a researcher with unfamiliarity in qualitative research as there are few procedure and prescriptions (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). The thematic analysis offers a theoretically flexible and accessible approach in analysing the qualitative data. It also helps in searching the themes or patterns and their relations to different ontological and epistemological positions. Thematic analysis is a widely useful method of qualitative research (Braun, & Clarke, 2006).

## Conclusion

Clinical practice is central to the health care and nurses play an important role. There is substantial improvement in health care. The disease spectrum also changed from traditional infectious diseases or deficiency disorders to non-communicable diseases. Continuing improvement is essential in various research methods to generate evidence. Applying qualitative research methodology in nursing, conducting more of qualitative research should be highlighted. Standardisation of qualitative research especially in a diverse linguistic, cultural and religious context is essential.

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