

QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE

What are we talking about?

This document does not attempt to present the definitive definitions of quantitative and qualitative data, instead the main ideas are presented in order that you can see the key differences between these two forms of data. Note that there are numerous similarities between these two methods.



| | Quantitative | Qualitative |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| General framework | To confirm hypothesis about phenomena | To explore phenomena |
| | Instruments use more rigid style of eliciting and categorizing responses to questions | Instruments use more flexible, iterative style of eliciting and categorizing responses to questions |
| | Use highly structured methods such as questionnaires, surveys, and structured observation | Use semi-structured methods such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, and participant observation |
| Analytical objectives | To quantify variation (i.e., count) | To describe variation |
| | To predict causal relationships | To describe and explain relationships |
| | To describe characteristics of a population | To describe individual experiences and group norms |
| Question format | Closed-ended | Open-ended |
| Data format | Numerical (obtained by assigning numerical values to responses) | Obtained by developing themes that summarize the experience or understanding of the participants |
| Flexibility in study design | Study design is stable from beginning to end | Some aspects of the study are flexible (for example, the addition, exclusion, or wording of particular interview questions) |
| | Participant responses do not influence or determine how / which questions researchers ask next | Participant responses affect how and which questions researchers ask next |
| | Study design is subject to statistical assumptions and conditions | Study design is iterative, that is, data collection and research questions may be modified according to what is learned |

References:

- Brizuela, J.P., et al. (2000). (Eds.), Introduction. *Acts of inquiry in qualitative research*. Harvard Educational Review, Reprint Series No. 34.
- Denzin and Lincoln. (2011). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Sage Publications Ltd.: Thousand Oaks.
- Mack et al. (2005). *Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collector's Field Guide*. USA: Family Health International, 3.