

Chapter 34

Ethical Issues of Qualitative Research

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is aimed to discuss the ethical issues of qualitative research. Because of nature and forms of qualitative research, ethical issues, validity and reliability of qualitative research has been discussed in many research investigations. By nature ethical issues in qualitative research are vague and inherent. These ethical issues of qualitative research have been discussed by researchers and experts from different areas. This chapter discusses the focal points of ethical issues. The interactions and the interest of concerned parties of qualitative research form the ethical issues. Moreover, different views (Positivist and relativist) of ethical issues of qualitative research raise some complexity. This chapter discusses the various issue of qualitative research from various perspectives. Researchers' opinions on the ethical issues of qualitative research have been discussed, and after that the chapter has been arranged with the basic ethical issues of qualitative research as the area is very vast.

INTRODUCTION

In broad, research approach can be classified in two categories; Qualitative research approach and Quantitative research approach. Qualitative research has been defined in various ways. Basically, Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world (Merriam, 2009). The qualitative nature of research may be derived from the research issue, the methods used, the analysis strategies, and the scientific justification of procedure used (Heyink, & Tymstra, 1993). Qualitative research may follow various form like Phenomenology, Case Study, Ethnography, Inductive Thematic Analysis, Grounded Theory, Discourse/Conversation Analysis, Narrative Analysis and Mixed Methods. Qualitative data may derive from audio, text or video sources (Ryan, & Bernard, 2000). Data may be collected by participant

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observation, in-depth interviews, focus groups or by document analysis. These various nature, form, research execution style and research input raise different complexity in their respective area.

Generally, the term 'Ethics' is associated with the discipline like philosophy and theology. Ethics is often defined as a system of moral principles, which standard and concepts defined, systematized and recommend concepts of right or wrong behavior (James, 2003). Ethics is relative at least to an extent also. Therefore, it is agreed that subject moral, social, political and cultural back forms the shape of ethics in the relevant environment.

Area of qualitative research is vast. Qualitative research can be found in the area of social science including economics, psychology, sociology, anthropology, politics, geography and law and in the area of applied science including nursing research, pharmacy practice research, social work research and so on (Murphy, Dingwall, Greatbatch, Parker, & Watson, 1998). Consequently, ethical concern is vast. Ethical issues are important to ensure the common standard of the research. However, argument has emerged for differentiating the ethical issues for different areas e.g., between social research and medical research (e.g., Tanner, & Shaw, 2000). This chapter discusses the common ethical issues from the perspective of research process.

Qualitative researchers are increasingly recognizing the struggle to find the sound balance between the autobiography of the researcher and biography of the participants. At the time of collection of data, it is required for the researcher to collect the real thinking of participants. At the same time, he/she must ensure that the participants are not influenced by the researchers. Be a 'snooping stranger' and a 'good friend' simultaneously is big dilemma in many forms of qualitative research (Jarvie, 1982). In case of data analysis, researchers also play a dual role as a researcher and a research subject, which adds a complex layer to the subsequent analysis of data (Matteson, Lincoln, & Yvonna, 2009). Therefore, researchers own values often shape the studies they conduct. Ethical issues are concerned from the questionnaire development processes to the interpretation of the research results in the qualitative research. And ethical issues appear in various forms. Ethical issues might be discussed from various perspective; the research methodology, rights and obligation of the concerned parties, research interest etc.

This chapter discusses the basic ethical issues on the basis of previous literature. In previous literature ethical issues of qualitative research has been presented in various ways. For example; Helen Simons (2006) discusses the code of ethics and clarify the rules, standard, principles and theories to discuss the ethics in research. John Johnson and David Altheide (2002) mention that ethics is issue based rather than research based. To describe their view, they discuss five spheres of ethics; 1) Personal Ethics, 2) Research Ethics, 3) Intellectual Ethics, 4) Professional Ethics and 5) Corporate Ethics. Steiner Kvale (1996) posed three ethical models within which the researchers reflect the ethical issues; Duty ethics of principles, Utilitarian ethics of consequence and value ethics of skills. Elmes, Kantowitz, and Roediger (1995) discusses some basic issues of ethics in qualitative research, e.g., Informed Consent, No deception, Right to withdraw, Debriefing and confidentiality. Bahn and Weatherill (2013) focus on the self-care practice during the sensitive data collection stage. Sinha and Back (2013) discuss ethical stance under the two way communication environment of participants and researchers. Peled and Leichtentrill (2002) discuss the ethics of qualitative research under some guiding assumptions. Ian Shaw (2003, 2008) discusses the basic issues of qualitative research. Apart of these, he discusses some ethical issues like ethical issues in evaluation research, fieldwork and others considering their distinctiveness. It seems that Ian Shaw (2008) covers the vast area of ethical issues in an excellent way in a short space.

Ethical issues rise through the different school of opinions, obligation and interaction of concerned parties, from basic principles and from special circumstances. In this chapter, the ethical issue has been

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