Perspectives on Qualitative Research

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Contents

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Perspectives on Qualitative Research

Introduction

This book is the outcome of a consultation organized by the ISST with CEHAT and Healthwatch, with support from the Anusandhan Trust, as one of the activities undertaken under the Abortion Assessment India Project. The consultation brought together a group of researchers from different disciplines in a two-day consultation to examine different aspects of qualitative research methodology.

Qualitative research techniques are well-developed and used extensively in different disciplines. While in some disciplines such as sociology these may be used as stand alone techniques, in others such as economics they are generally seen as an adjunct or a supplement to quantitative research methods. It is generally agreed that certain questions or issues are not amenable to quantitative methods and require a different methodological approach. At the same time, there is a strong pressure on researchers to be able to provide generalisable facts and this is far more difficult with qualitative methods that are often oriented to the individual and in particular, to case studies, and small samples.

The consultation tried to address these concerns. Can the findings of qualitative methods be upscaled and generalised? How do they compare with quantitative research findings? Should they be used as a stand alone technique or in combination with quantitative methods? What is the 'value added' of using qualitative methods?

These questions were addressed through presentations based on experience with different studies (including CEHAT / Healthwatch on experiences of the Abortion Assessment India Project). The presentations included some new qualitative research methods found to be useful in getting new information.

Thanks are due to Ravi Duggal and Vimala Ramachandran for supporting the idea of such a workshop, and to the six speakers around whose presentations the discussion was structured. Professor Pertti Pelto gave the keynote address with an overview of qualitative research techniques. This was followed by Professor Leela Visaria's comparative overview of quantitative and qualitative techniques with special reference to health research. Dr Suneeta Sheel reviewed the development of guidelines for ethical research and systems of monitoring, drawing upon the experience of the Abortion Assessment Project. Ms Vimala Ramachandran discussed new and innovative techniques that have been used in recent research on education. Professor Rajni Palriwala discussed experiences with ethnographic methods. Finally, Ms Jyotsna Sivaramayya discussed issues that arise in conducting research involving a researcher - NGO partnership.

We hope these discussions will be of interest and prove useful to other researchers.

Ratna M. Sudarshan
Director, ISST

Workshop Proceedings:

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The workshop was introduced by Vimala Ramachandran. As an activity under the Abortion Assessment India Project, it was hoped that the workshop would allow for reflection and sharing of experiences in using qualitative research methodology, in this and other studies. One of the major issues that needs to be discussed further is that of ethical issues that arise in using qualitative (and other) research methodologies. As an exploratory workshop, the agenda had deliberately been kept very open-ended.

I

The keynote presentation was by **Professor Pertti Pelto**. He highlighted ways to make qualitative materials more productive. Among the advantages of qualitative data gathering is that it allows people's voices to be heard, provides contextual information and is less costly. However, there are many areas in which research groups can improve the quality of data gathering.

Some of the ways to improve the quality of data gathering are: greater use of mapping techniques including social mapping. Professor Pelto also discussed the importance of preventing misuse of key informant (KI) interviews which are distinct from 'cases'. According to him KI interviews should be open-ended, should refer to general information and should not be about KI's own characteristics.

Professor Pelto also discussed the use and misuse of focus group discussions (FGDS). FGDs often produce socially approved perspectives and superficial attitudes, rather than realistic behavioural

data. He felt that confidentiality can be violated when the moderator asks participants about their own personal behaviour. FGDs are also difficult to record and analyse, he said.

Individual case studies can probe better into actual behaviours, but it is important to have a sufficient number of case studies.

Professor Pelto stressed the fact that projects should be based on conceptual frameworks and must build on prior research.

Discussion

- A recent study in Rajasthan on teacher motivation used both individual interviews and focus group discussions. It was found that the two yielded contradictory findings. In the individual interviews with teachers, as well as a group discussion held in the presence of the head teacher in the school, one set of opinions was offered. However in focus group discussions held in the office of the teachers union, completely opposite statements were made. As a result, fresh interviews were conducted in different locations away from the school. This experience brings out the complexity of the method – even if the tools are being properly used, there are issues of location, of where the interview is conducted that must be considered.

- A recent study conducted with HIV positive people had highlighted the value of FGDs. Even though the issue itself is very sensitive they were willing to discuss their concerns as a homogenous group more readily than in individual interviews on the subject.

- In response to the discussion on individual interviews vs group discussions, it was suggested that in any group there would be a few who are more articulate and could be identified as key informants with whom further in-depth conversations would be valuable. When it is seen that people are offering different views in different places (as with the teachers above) it might just mean that the truth lies in between. Group discussions rarely offer a connected complex picture fully, rather they offer disjointed pieces of information which can be picked up and explored further in individual conversations. The personality of the data gatherer is a central matter. These experiences bring out the advantage in using multiple methods.

- In family research, the experience was often that the group offers a comfort level that makes it easier for people to talk rather than during individual interviews. What has worked well is to triangulate the methods and verify what emerges from the individual in a group and vice versa.

- The quality of the researcher is extremely important in either type of data gathering, which brought in the role of training. It was pointed out that a sure way of ensuring that people do not open up in a group is to start with a set of background questions about the persons as in a quantitative survey. It is better to get this kind of information later at the end or even in a subsequent meeting.

- Training of researchers and moderators for FGDs is important as is triangulating between different methods and using more than one method.

- It was suggested that media influences thinking and needs to be countered

- There is need to be cognisant of power relations between the researchers and the researched; the reason why public and private discourse might differ has everything to do with structures of power. Thus a teacher speaking as an individual will be conscious of being judged, a feeling that may not be present within the structure of a trade union where there is a comfort and sense of collective empowerment.

- For reasons that might have to do with feeling powerless or at least weaker, respondents often like to have a companion present with them during the interview.

- In the last seven or eight years there has been a lot of effort to repeat the same kind of qualitative studies in different locations. This kind of research needs a format which everyone follows although there can be flexibility and use of multiple methods. Such flexibility is often criticised by those who use quantitative methods.

- Case studies are a powerful tool. At the same time certain patterns and regularities can only be picked up with a larger number of cases. With more cases one has more confidence in identifying sub types, sub categories and other patterns.

- Perhaps one day research will see someone taking a random sample and then have in depth qualitative interviewing of the random sample – or perhaps this is already being done. There is flexibility in shifting back and forth amongst different methods and plenty of potential in trying to understand the data better by using some statistical techniques.

- We need to distinguish between cases and case studies. Case study implies a small number and an individual based approach. Cases in an interview could go up to a large number. Sometimes even one case can shed a lot of light – you need to have just one disabled person present to understand the need for a ramp.

II

Professor Leela Visaria addressed some of the key concerns and issues involved in the debate on combining qualitative and quantitative research, which she had done effectively in much of her own research, mostly in the area of health. Professor Visaria discussed the very important question of why there is a quantitative verses qualitative debate. She pointed out that the two methods can be creatively combined to provide very rich data.

According to her, the distinguishing features of qualitative research are: the researcher is the data gathering instrument and is subjectively involved in the research, the design emerges as the study unfolds and the aim is to get a detailed description. In quantitative research, on the other hand, the aim is to classify features, count and explain them through statistical models. The study is designed before data collection and questionnaires are used as the tool. Qualitative research is usually recommended in early phases of the research and is exploratory and inductive in nature. Quantitative research is confirmatory and deductive in nature and is carried out in the later phases of research. Qualitative data provides contextual detail but cannot be generalised while quantitative help test hypotheses but often lack depth. Despite these differences, the boundries between qualitative and quantitative methods are becoming blurred.

The controversy of quantitative vs qualitative has stemmed from perceptions that the two methods have evolved from distinct streams of disciplines. A perceptive researcher can combine the two methods and draw on the strengths of each, recognise their complementarities and enhancement in interpretation of the issue under study. Professor Visaria took up the example of the study of female selective abortion in which both the methods were combined. Household based survey was conducted with the aim to obtain statistical information on the overall abortion rate, parity specific rate, etc., while issues of decision-making process, sex preference, role of service providers were probed in focus group discussions to expand understanding of the why and how of sex selective abortion prevalent in the community.

Discussion

- Rather than seeing qualitative and quantitative methods as being in opposition to each other, the challenge is to bring them together, look at each method as being located along a continuum. Any specific piece of research can then be located at the appropriate point along the continuum. Triangulation too needs to be seen not just in terms of validation or the complementary nature of data, but actually as a way of expanding the concept or the subject and the study. It is also important not to undertake qualitative research as a sort of add on, but rather to make different methodologies speak to each other.

- One of the reasons for wanting to use qualitative methodologies is its ability to address the issue of inequality.

- There is often an underlying assumption that qualitative research might be less objective. This is especially so because in an FGD for instance the biases of the moderator might easily creep in. But it can equally be argued that quantitative methods too are not objective, or that certain questions did not enter the field; and that what is seen as relevant at the time of survey and what is not, introduces elements of subjectivity.

- It was suggested that what is described as 'hard facts' do not always represent the truth. For example, a study on school infrastructure came up with good numbers on indicators like seating, pupils per teacher etc., and yet the investigators said the schools were poor. It then emerged that the size of the classrooms was very small, hence they were overcrowded and the furniture was very dilapidated. Without the qualitative information, the quantitative data could not be properly interpreted. One way of understanding this example is to say that what was needed in this case is more data and more questions which would include the size of the room, the condition of materials, etc. It does not necessarily call for qualitative methods.

- It is also important that qualitative methods are applied with full understanding of the subject. The sampling needs to be appropriate and not biased.

- It is in the detailed observation that quantification is difficult. For example, in looking at the interactions between teachers and students, this is something that cannot be easily quantified and which calls for acute observation; other examples might be, whether the teacher is paying attention to all students or is focusing on some who might be from a high caste, better dressed, good at studies, or whatever.

- Qualitative research can become quite objective too provided the investigator is experienced and aware of the ways in which subjectivity can creep in. In the end it is only necessary to be aware of what kinds of subjectivity there might have been present in the data collection.

- It would be valuable to combine the methods in gender research, but there are few examples of quantitative research where gender is integrated into the analysis: often it stops at sex disaggregation of data.

- The desire to be comprehensive is often a problem in itself. Research always builds on previous work and will lead to other studies in the future and always is, in that sense, incomplete. If we accept this, we are more likely to be open, to hear things that are not part of the initial agenda.

- The close-ended nature of quantitative research, where one pre defines what we are looking for, stands in contrast to the more open-ended agenda of qualitative research. At the same time one has to be careful of the seductive nature of qualitative presentations, and the danger of drawing conclusions based on what might actually be an exception.

- Equally in both quantitative as in qualitative research, the data, the results, the outputs are a result of interaction between sets of data gathering approaches and all data are relative to the way in which the data were gathered. Data does not speak to us unmediated – it is always mediated by the questions we ask, through the conceptual framework we use. There is nothing like pure data.

III

Ms Vimala Ramachandran spoke about her experience of doing qualitative research in education and the tools used. She pointed out that while there has been an exponential increase in research on education this has not had an impact on planning, assessing needs inputs or bringing on board 'voices of children'. There is a huge gap between statistics and the situation on the

ground and the needs of children have been lost in the process. The emphasis has been on the input into the system and not the outcomes. Including children's voices in educational research is very important. She advocated a child-centered research, that would include classroom practices, teacher-child relationship and the home context. These are important inputs for training and other school level interventions.

She raised the issue of whether qualitative research can complement quantitative research. Select studies have shown that alternative approaches can help. And if executed with care and attention they can also be carried out on a large scale. The game of snakes and ladders was used with children to investigate the factors that influence the chances of a child completing five years of education.

Discussion

- In reflecting on this study, it seems that it was not just the procedure for data collection but the procedure for interpretation that helped in bringing out a number of things. The same data was given to different people who were asked to look at it from their own perspectives – from the perspective of the child in one case, of the school in another. The same data was thus given different interpretations and thus was a way of optimising understanding. The data was collected from different people, parents, teachers and children, thus allowing us to see what it is that each was looking for, and what defined a 'good school' in the eyes of each group. It emerged that children had very clear views on what a good school was – one where the teacher was sensitive to their needs, was concerned about them, and committed to teaching, and not one with just good infrastructure.

- It is still a grey area to see how such studies could feed into educational planning and how the insights from research might feed into policy. For example we found very large numbers of children in school who also work, and this runs counter to the prevalent view in Andhra Pradesh where children not in school are equated with child labour. Without strong quantitative data, it is difficult to engage effectively with this view.

- The study tried to capture systemic perspectives rather than individual children perspectives, recognising that what the child faces is often determined by the family / household situation, or the transport availability from school to home. But attempts were made to capture different subjectivities by looking at the situation through the eyes of different people.

- There is also the question of linking up the differences among children, children's world and their voices, with the differences in structural factors. When we began our study, we asserted to the World Bank that the factors that facilitate or impede the journey to school are not at the level of the child, they are at the level of the family. Therefore, we took the family and not the child as the unit of the study.

- The snakes and ladders paradigm helped in understanding many of these issues. We were able to see that the eldest sibling, not necessarily only the girl, even the boy if he had three younger siblings to look after, would be taken out of school by the parents.

- By looking at data at different levels the research team attempted to capture multi levelling of realities. The researcher just took what the children said and then classified it.

- Using the classroom observation checklist we were able to observe that in all states, some teachers were discriminating according to how well dressed, clean and bright the children were. The entire teaching is directed to the children who are bright and able to absorb. The children who are seen as not being able to absorb are the ones who are assigned to the back of the class and most of these happen to be girls who are so exhausted when they come to school after finishing other tasks that they fall asleep in the school.

- Poverty was a big issue in research findings. The aggregate figures for UP and Karnataka are very varied with Karnataka at the top and UP at the bottom. But the condition of those living in poverty in Karnataka and UP was not very different.

- The qualitative materials brought up a lot of questions related to work before and after school, amount of work, etc. While the work appeared to be the same for boys and girls in the rural and the same for boys and girls in the urban areas, but there was a difference in the amount of work done in urban and rural areas with urban children not working as much as the rural children.

- One has to look at child development in a holistic manner, not in stages or in a compartmentalised way. What happens to a child from 6 to 36 months affects the ability of the child to learn in primary school.

IV

Dr **Sunita Sheel Bandewar** traced the development of bioethics since the 1960s and explained the basic tenets of research ethics that relate to the principles of autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence and justice. She then took up her work regarding abortion research and the need for specific ethical guidelines for such issues in India. The context of abortion research is extremely sensitive as it relates to issues of stigma, sexuality, morality, women's low status in society combined with the fact that abortion is something that only women have to deal with.

Referring to her research on abortion in India she pointed out that when they began their work they realised that ethical guidelines for social research in health do not exist in India, and that is why CEHAT took the lead role to develop them. There are four stakeholders in any research endeavour – sponsors, researchers, research participants and gate keepers; and the relationship between all these is highly unequal. In the abortion study the ethical issues and challenges that had to be addressed were regarding whose priority and interest was reflected in the selection of topic, selection of research team, study area and research methodology. She suggested the need to specify research ethics during the entire life span of any research.

Discussion

- What are the ethical issues involved in the selection of research topics? Often the issue is defined by donors, from above, and depends on their priorities. Alternatively one can interact with a community and identify what are the critical research issues from their perspective.

- If the FGDs were used to identify women for further investigative study, does this not go against the ethics of conducting FGDs so as not to ask any individual specific questions. It was clarified that this was not done.

- When should the researcher be providing information to the prospective research participants about the research depends upon the topic of the enquiry and the extent to which the research team is in position to anticipate untoward events and is equipped to handle them. Thus, contamination need not be the routine concern. This concern does not apply if the information is given as de-briefing, that is giving information post study/interview.

- If during the study the abortion providers know the reason for the researchers being there, and the women who come for abortion care are interviewed, then this will influence the care that is given to them, and hence you will not get a neutral situation.

- The issue of giving compensation was also brought up as part of ethics. It was explained that it is the policy of the institution to provide compensation which is equivalent to the loss of daily wages. If a higher amount is offered to respondents then this also sets a precedent for any other NGO working in that area. Also this sort of information cannot

remain a secret in a rural setting, and given the vulnerabilities in a rural setting, it will be difficult to know whether you are getting authentic information.

- The ethical committee has been very valuable in the research. They help articulate the ethical issues faced. The first review of the ethical guidelines was conducted before going into the field, second after returning, third before project report was put into the public domain. (A fourth review is optional, to be done during fieldwork according to IEC protocol, but was not done during the abortion study.)

- In the Abortion Assessment project there were 22 partners who conducted the research. The project plan was reviewed by the ethics committee and they were also told to set up their own committees for their institutes if they did not already have one. The ethics committee did not act as a police, they interacted as peers.

- Many donors also ask for setting up the ethics committee, the question is whether one should have an institutional ethics committee or should one have project-based ethics committees. Institutional ethics committees need to be encouraged. When the IEC feels ill-equipped to respond to particular applications for ethics review because of the topic of enquiry therein, it is advisable and accepted to invite experts on the IEC for that particular application.

V

Professor Rajni Palriwala discussed her field experiences in her study of the family in India and the Netherlands and her work on dowry. She examined the notion of self-reflexivity in the work of the ethnographer.

Professor Palriwala compared her experiences of carrying out ethnographic work in two different cultural and political contexts. The first referred to her fieldwork in Rajasthan and her situation as an urban-middle class educated woman and that in Netherlands as an anthropologist from a 'backward' part of the world. Another difference between the two cultures is that the boundaries between the informant and the friend became blurred in Rajasthan while in Netherlands the compartmentalisation between various institutions enabled the participants to speak more freely. Whether the anthropologist should be fluent with the language was also a point of difference while carrying out fieldwork in the two cultures.

Discussion

- The theory of method – danger of mistaking the data for the phenomenon itself. It is important to see the data as one limited perspective

- Essentially research should be driven by what you want to know, not by what a funding agency wants to know: the need for relevance in the construction of reality

- The theoretical notion of Bordieu's *habitus* is important: the context can actually become the text itself, and not something that you need to control when doing research.

- The issue of meaning, of different meanings being given to the same notion, as in adolescents feeling they did not have privacy, while the parents of the same adolescents said yes we have privacy, one seeing it as an individual and the other as a family concept. Hence importance of ensuring that the researcher and the respondent share the same understanding.

- The issue of self-reflexivity is very important. The researcher too is an element being constructed by the field. Both the researcher and the thing being researched can change when ethnographic methods are used implying a longer duration of contact.

- Ethnographic study allows for the multiplicity of methods and the value of talk. The researcher is asked about issues that are being studied such as asking advice when the child is sick while conducting child studies.

- The open-ended nature of qualitative methods means that you get data that seems messy and voluminous. How do you convert voluminous data into 10,000 words and how do you determine what is important and what order of things is important. One of the ways that anthropologists deal with this by keeping field diaries. Processing even the first round of data takes very long. We do not know beforehand what is relevant. We look at the same material differently after two years.

- Since there are different points of view in terms of why research is conducted which is also tied to a larger political vision of society, it is important to remember that data are not phenomena and that even the phenomena are not the whole truths in themselves. Truth is always through interpretation and a question of epistemology and ontology.

VI

Ms Jyotsna Sivaramayya discussed the various difficulties and advantages of carrying out research with NGOs. The context of research with NGOs is fundamentally different from other situations as it is a tripartite relationship between the researcher, NGO and the community. Research has a secondary status for most NGOs. It is often believed that qualitative techniques are more suitable, since participatory tools are assumed to be easy to use at the grassroots. Research with NGOs often takes place within many constraints such as shortage of time, wariness of NGOs regarding researchers and a lack of flexibility associated with qualitative research. However, many NGOs have found it useful to carry out research that will aid their advocacy efforts. The relationship of the NGO with the community has a tremendous influence on the process and outcomes of the research. Tensions also arise between the researcher and the activist as the perspectives and needs of the two are different. The researcher also faces the emotional pressures in the field about which there are no easy solutions.

Discussion

- NGOs are increasingly under pressure to document their work, and hence are looking for researchers to work with them, do an impact assessment and so on.

- What NGO's might want to do is not always 'research' – it might be better described as 'data gathering, situation assessment, getting useful information, *jaankari*…'

- NGOs are multi attitude kind of places, where a few people may not see much use of research, but the younger people are saying that we need to get a lot of data.

- NGOs that have been able to do what they set out to do are good at listening, that is an integral part of their work. Hence the view that NGO workers may not be good at listening is highly debatable.

- There will always be some bias as a result of the interaction between the data gathering people and the community. The researcher is somebody that people react to in a particular way, she is defined and will get data accordingly. The way to get past that problem is by getting data from more than one source — 'triangulating'.

- At times the donor agency expects the NGO receiving the funds to carry out the research.

- In some cases there is a casualness in carrying out research on the part of the NGOs. There is a lack of rigour about writing reports, and it is often difficult to break the barriers since they do not view research as necessary.

- Regarding using NGOs as the entry point into a community, this role could also be done by the panchayat leaders or other community leaders.

- NGOs are also used to get the flavour of the field and also as a cost cutting strategy. Universities will also capture the reality but they are also likely to ask questions which an NGO may not.

- Asking field workers to write diaries provides a good way of getting feedback.

- Avoid assumptions regarding the power relationship between the researcher and the researched, that the researched does not have any agency. If the researched don't want to respond to some questions, they avoid answering them.

- The nature of the relationship with NGOs varies. At times the relationship is problematic because you are using the NGO as a source of information. But often it is the other way round when the NGO takes the lead in defining the research issues which they have identified through their work in the field. One may not necessarily add anything to their knowledge but put the information more systematically and also make it available to a wider audience.

VII

For the future

- It was suggested that such discussions on research methods, held from time to time, can be very useful. It provides a forum for those discussions that are generally held in the corridor, outside of the actual research presentation.

- Another suggestion was that putting together research protocols and sharing tools can be useful to other researchers.

- Future discussions can perhaps focus on a selected theme, e.g. 'demography for dummies'.

At the conclusion the participants expressed their gratitude to CEHAT and Healthwatch for the idea of the workshop and for sponsoring it. Special thanks were also given to Ravi Duggal and Vimala Ramachandran for taking the initiative, and to all those who shared their experiences in the workshop. ISST was also thanked for organising the workshop.

ome Notes on Qualitative Data-Gathering

Pertti Pelto

Pathways to more productive Qualitative Materials

This is a compilation of suggestions and thoughts shared by Professor Pelto on the issue of enhancing the productivity of qualitative research

Qualitative Data-Gathering has several advantages:

- Designed to "hear the voices of the people."
- Includes Local Vocabularies and "definitions of local realities."
- Obtains *Contextual Information* about specific situations, specific behaviours.
- Reduces costs; as research can be smaller in scope.

Suggestions for Improved Qualitative Research

- There are a number of areas in which research groups can improve qualitative data gathering and utilization.

I. *Research Reports Should Make More Use Of Maps And Various Mapping Procedures*

Such mapping techniques can assist the research in the following ways:

- Shows placement of study population(s) to key features: city, highways, facilities.
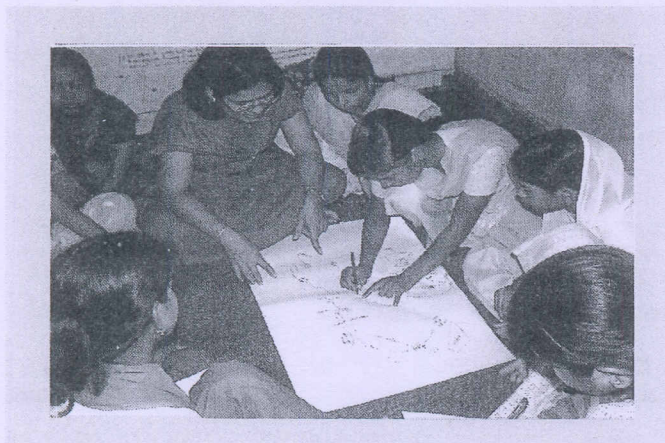
- *Social Mapping* helps to "break the ice," with participants and get key information in a focused manner.
- Individuals and groups generally "open up" when drawing maps.
- Identifies the "hot spots" in studies dealing with HIV/AIDS.
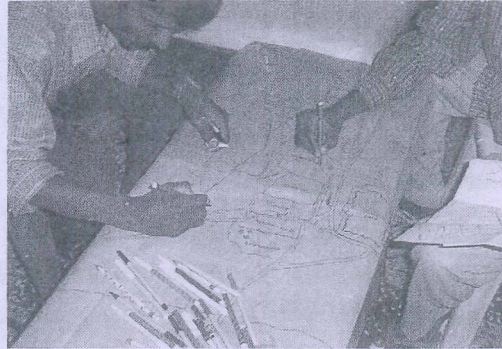
II. Research Should Achieve Clarity On Dealing With Key Informants. Misconceptions And Misuse Of Key Informant (KI) Interviewing Should Be Avoided

- Many protocols for KIs look like Survey Instruments with open-ended questions.
- KI interviews should be *very open-ended;* to explore the informants special areas of knowledge.
- KI interviews are about general information; not about the KI's own characteristics.

More on Key Informants

- Good Key Informants should be contacted several times.
- We should make a clear distinction between Key Informant interviews vs "cases."
- Generally it is not useful to count "how many key informants" are involved.

The following diagrams will help clarify:

Usually, KI guidelines follow the pattern shown in diagram 1.

1. Some Typical KI Guidelines

KI 01	Topic1	Topic2	Topic3	Topic4	Topic5
KI 02	Topic1	Topic2	Topic3	Topic4	Topic5
KI 03	Topic1	Topic2	Topic3	Topic4	Topic5
KI 04	Topic1	Topic2	Topic3	Topic4	Topic5
KI 05	Topic1	Topic2	Topic3	Topic4	Topic5
KI 06	Topic1	Topic2	Topic3	Topic4	Topic5

The diagram shows the following:

* Each key informant is interviewed about the same topics.
* For each topic there are open-ended questions and/or checklist of subtopics.
* Interviewers are expected to cover all the topic areas with each of the key informants.

To improve KI interviewing, the following guidelines (Diagram2) should be considered. Key Informant Interviews: Each KI is different

KI 1	Topic One	Topic Two	Topic Three	
KI 2	Topic One	Topic Two	Topic Six	Topic Seven
KI 3	Topic Three	Topic Four	Topic Six	
KI 4	Topic Three			
KI 5	Topic Five	Topic Four	Topic Seven	
KI 2 2nd	Topic Four	Topic Seven	Topic Three	
KI 4 2nd	Topic Eight	Topic Two		
KI 2 3rd	Topic Five			
KI 3 2nd	Topic Eight	Topic Five	Topic One	

In this case, the diagram shows the following:

* Each KI interview covers a different set of topics.
* Each topical area is examined with more than one KI.
* "Best" key informants are contacted more than once. (Some may be contacted many times.)
* Later interviews build on (and probe deeper) information received in earlier interviews.

III. Research Should Not Over-Use Or Misuse FGDs

Difficulties

* For sensitive topics, FGDs often produce misleading, "socially approved" perspectives.
* Often very difficult to get "homogeneity" of the groups.
* Often produce superficial attitudes and opinions—not realistic behaviours.
* FGDs are difficult to record, transcribe and analyse.

An Example from the Literature to Illustrate:

- D. Hellitzer-Allen and colleagues (1994) compared FGDs and individual interview young girls in Malawi (Africa). In FGDs girls denied knowledge of condoms and se experience.
- In private they gave more realistic accounts of their actual behaviours, including kn edge and use of condoms.

Serious Misuse of FGDs: Violation of Confidentiality

- There are a number of transcripts of FGDs in which the moderators asked individ about their own personal behaviours, including sexual behaviours.
- Sometimes individual participants refer to the behaviours of others in the group.

IV. Need More Creative Use Of Individual Case Interviews

- "Case interviews" can probe into actual behaviours; and actual events.
- Case interviews try to focus on "key behaviours"; perhaps suggested by key informar
- **Example:** Step-by-step process in treatment seeking, including decision-making ir home and interactions with the provider.

Some Guidelines for Case Interviews

- Get enough cases for some numerical presentation e.g. CREHPA researchers in N collected 43 interviews of Injectible Drug Users.
- M. Joshi did 50 in-depth interviews with adolescent girls about their relationships boys.

V. Projects Need To Have Conceptual Frameworks

- Conceptual Frameworks should identify the key topical areas, variables, and factors studied.
- They should be very flexible, and revised on the basis of new qualitative information.
- Review of the research literature gives many clues about the important topical areas, issues which need to be raised.

Most Studies do not Build Effectively on Prior Research

- **For example:** Many recent studies of "adolescent reproductive and sexual health" ap to ignore the growing amount of available literature (much unpublished literature) or topic.
- Studies report "percentages" of young people doing various "risky" or anti-social behavi with very little attention to predictor variables, or contexts of the behaviours.

The Big Challenge: To Develop Complex System Analysis of Key Areas Issues.

- **Example:** Various studies report domestic violence—in anywhere from 20 to 50 per ce households. Issues to examine:
    - Many studies don't explore the extent, or the frequency. In the past month? T months, past year? How many times?
    - Contexts of "provocation." What issue(s) provoked the violence?

14

Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methods

Leela Visaria

This is a brief note from Professor Visaria's experience and insight into combining qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Outlining the features of two research methods

Qualitative	Quantitative
Aim is to provide a complete, detailed description	Aim is to classify features, count them, and explain through statistical models
Design emerges as the study unfolds	Before collection of data study should be carefully designed/(Design prior to data collection)
Data in the form of words, pictures or objects	Data in the form of numbers and statistics
Researcher is data gathering instrument (schedules).	Data instrument tools are questionnaires
Researcher subjectively involved in subject matter	Researcher assumes objectivity and distances from subject matter
Generally recommended in early phases of research projects – exploratory in nature – inductive in nature	Recommended in later phases of research projects – confirmatory in nature – deductive in nature
Researcher may not know in advance what she/he is looking for	All components of study are carefully designed before data are collected
Qualitative data 'rich', can provide contexual details but cannot be generalised	Quantitative data can help test hypotheses, but generally lacks depth

Thus, the basic differences between qualitative and quantitative research methods are as follows :

* In types of questions - probing vs non-probing
* In sample size – small vs large
* Information per respondent/group – a lot vs varies
* Administration – special skill vs little special skill

- Ability to replicate – low vs high
- Analysis – subjective or interpretive vs statistical or summarizing
- Hardware – tape recorder, discussion guides vs questionnaire, forms

**However, the differences and the boundaries between the
two approaches and methods are becoming blurred**

Why is there a debate about qualitative versus quantitative research?

- The controversy has stemmed from perceptions that the two methods have evolved from distinct streams of disciplines
- The debate is about the general assumptions involved in conducting research using the two methods
  - qualitative method involves judgment but quantitative method does not
  - qualitative method is inductive but quantitative is deductive
  - qualitative method is exploratory but quantitative is confirmatory
- The debate is about the nature of data collected
  - verbal versus numerical

Are the two methods diametrically opposite? Is combination of the two metho possible or even desirable?

- Some element of truth in the basic assumptions underlying the two methods but each can used either as exploratory or as confirmatory or as inductive or deductive
- The fundamental difference may be in the way a research issue is addressed – context a flexibility are important in qualitative research – questions emerge and change
- Qualitative data can be converted into quantitative information – assigned numerical valu coded

A perceptive researcher can combine the two methods and draw on the strengths of each, recogn their complementarities and enhancement in interpretation of issue under study

There is a need for the triangulation of research

- Move from qualitative to quantitative techniques and back again
- Define the problem – using qualitative approach or method
- Generate hypotheses
- Define and test hypotheses – using quantitative survey, interview approach
- Explore the results in depth – using qualitative approach
- Aim is not merely validation but deepening and broadening understanding of the is under study

Research can be a back and forth process

Two examples of research that combine the two methods

1) **Study of domestic violence**

   - focus group discussions with women to understand the dimensions (nature, form, reasons) of violence and capture the language used to describe violence

- Textual information used to design structured questionnaires. These were administered to randomly selected sampled women, which provided estimates of percentage of women experiencing violence, different forms of violence, reasons for it, etc.

- In depth interviews of select women probing into the various facets provide context and rich text

The back and forth process has provided detailed understanding of the issue

Two examples of research that combine the two methods

2) **Female-selective abortion**

- Household based surveys conducted with the aim to obtain statistical information on overall abortion rate, parity specific rate, etc.

- Issues of decision-making process, sex preference, role of service providers probed in focus group discussions to expand understanding of the why and how of sex selective abortion prevalent in the community

By creatively combining findings using two methods in writing the research benefits.

- The 'dry' numerical data can be contexualized

- Verbatims at appropriate places can provide text and voice to the numerical data

- Interpretation of data becomes more meaningful, and grounded in reality

- Writing in any form (report, article) holds interest of people who can relate to the findings.

Qualitative Research in Education

Vimala Ramachandran

These are notes from Ms Vimala Ramachandran's presentation on the issues surrounding qualitative research in the field of education.

Problems in Elementary Education Research

- Exponential increase in research and impact assessments commissioned by the government / donors and mountains of data;
- Yet, practitioners admit that this information does not assist the following:
  - Planning for education
  - Assessing training needs of educators
  - Creating informed views on what other inputs are necessary
  - Taking on board the voices of children

So much and yet so little

- People grappling with improving quality of education admit:
  - There exist huge gaps between what statistics reveal and the situation on the ground
  - Children have been lost in the din of statistics. Researchers and practitioners only know what the system has put in and not the eventual outcome

Questions that emerge:

- Do we need new indicators or more indicators?
- Do we need new ways of tracking outcomes and progress?

Such research needs alternatives which can address:

- Child centred research
- Classroom practices, teacher-child relationship, the home context – which are important inputs for training and other school and community level interventions
  - Learning outcomes: alternatives to formal tests?

Examples:

- Pratham's experience of starting with elementary level skills and moving on – one level up, like a game – to be able to assess (not accurate, but fairly good estimate) of learning outcomes and levels.
- Balika Shikshan Shivir research – children could do "tests" from the books but could not read when any other material was given

- Children intimidated by outsiders "testing" them

Issues in education research

- Can qualitative research complement quantitative research?
  - Tease out the texture? Scratch beneath the surface?
  - Capture dynamic processes?
- Oh no!
  - Not valid!
  - It is expensive and takes a lot of time;
  - Need experienced people – not conventional investigators, but people who can work with children – establish rapport
  - Not many people / institutions who can do this

Is there another way?

- Experience of select studies demonstrate that alternative approaches can indeed help;
- If planned and executed with care and attention to detail – it can be done on a large scale;
- Given the gravity of the crisis of authentic and relevant information needed to inform action – there is greater openness to engage with new approaches and ideas
- New players in the area of both research and action

This presentation highlighted such issues by illustrating the snakes and ladders approach used in a study to investigate factors influencing children's chances of completing five years of education.

- Based on Snakes and Ladders – explore significant factors influencing situation around a child entering and successfully completing the primary education cycle 5 domains were identified
  - Child
  - Family
  - Community
  - School / AWC
  - Other services – health, water, sanitation

Used quantitative and qualitative

- Combination used as quantitative aspects were needed such as :
  - Data on children in schools and AWC
  - Drop out and retention
  - Primary/upper primary completion
- Also wanted to understand the why and the how through qualitative means and data.
  - Especially the child's world
  - Family circumstances
  - What happens inside the school and the classroom

Study sample description

- Six villages and six urban settlements each in Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh

- Reflecting diversity in terms of location, demographic characteristics, remoteness/accessibility, caste and community composition
- 18 families profiled in each state
- Detailed profiles of 63 children
- Health profiles of 119 children.

Process and Method :

- Developed a matrix of research questions – listing the tools which could be used to explore each question;
- Developed research tools and field tested them;
- Developed a matrix for data entry – entering the information collected through different tools against each research question
- Each state team met for 4 to 5 days to go over the matrix and this also gave a forum for investigators to share experiences, observations and problems encountered

The tools used were :

1.
   - A1: Identification of poverty households through key informants
   - A2: House-listing schedule (separate for rural and urban)
   - Developed criteria for sample selection

2.
   - B1 and B2: profile of sample village / urban area
   - B3: Household schedule – basic information
   - B3: Interview with primary care provider – mostly open ended;
   - B4: Health profile of children (sample – one infant and one school going age)
   - B5: Observation check-list – to capture developmental milestones, breastfeeding and supplementary feeding practices, food, illness and disability and discipline
   - B6: Matrix for observation of child activities and adult-child interaction

3.
   - C1: Interview schedule with school teacher and Aanganwadi worker;
   - C2: Interview schedule with health care provider (ANM, private healthcare provider)

4.
   - D1: Basic information and cohort analysis in government school and the AWC;
   - D2: Classroom observation check-list in school and check-list for observation of AWC;
   - D3: Group activities with children in 6+ age;
   - D4: Basic information of private school;
   - E1 to E3: FGDs questions which explored :
     - Village education committee
     - Most deprived pocket (where more children dropout were found)
     - Group of adolescent girls and boys

Classroom observation was used

- **Issues with this method :**
  - Apprehensive that teacher's behaviour may be artificial
  - Did not start with CO–researchers waited till children and teachers were familiar with them – by being present around the village for at least 4 to 5 days

– Used the primary school as the base – to familiarise locals with their presence.

Activities with children

- This was done towards the end of the stay in the village – by which time children were already friendly with the research team
- Activities included:
    – A few structured games
    – Time-line –where children were asked what they did from morning to night
    – Inside the school on a typical day – asked children to describe a typical day in school
- Girls and boys
- Different age groups

Valuable information from children was derived which helped researchers.

- To understand the home context, and what happened in the school
- Activities with children in the village – both school going as well as drop outs, some children also in private schools
- Get the voices of children
- All this can give tremendous insights to practitioners trying to make a difference on the ground.

Snakes and ladders

- Helped to identify factors that help children attend school, stay in school
- Gauge insights into why children do not learn:
    – Teaching and learning inside the school
    – Incentives (that exist) which make little difference
    – Work burden of children – especially eldest girl child
    – Impact of alcoholism, violence, insecurity at home on the learning ability of children
    – Attitudes / stereotypes / prejudices inside the school
    – Why children are malnourished – feeding practices and workload of mother / care giver

Issues raised with the study :

- Is this a valid "research methodology"
    – Conventional researchers may be comfortable with (ongoing study team example) interviewing older children.
- Can this be done on a larger scale?
- Is the information gathered "authentic"?

Ethics in Abortion Research

Sunita Sheel Bandewar

This is an overview provided by Dr Bandewar on the development of bio-ethics in research; looking specifically at abortion research.

SECTION I

ETHICS IN SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

Bioethics as a discipline

- Term coined in 1960 in the USA by V R Potter, a biochemist at Wisconsin. Bio implies biological knowledge or science of living + ethics which connotes knowledge of value system.

- Multidisciplinary field of enquiry, which addresses ethical issues in clinical practice and health care. Biomedical research involves human and animal health policy and environment

- Medical ethics are centuries old with terms as "decorum", "duty"

Sources of development of bioethics in 1960s

- Opening of once closed profession to public scrutiny

- Development of liberal individualism with which its focus on rights and autonomy forced paternalism to recede

- Development of new biomedical technologies that brought new ethical problems

- Renewed interest of philosophers in applied normative ethics

- Concerns about research with humans

- Turning away from religious debates and creation of secular spaces

HISTORY AND RELEVANCE

Psychology

- Stanley Milgram's work Obedience
- Stanford University Prison Experiment by Professor Zimbardo

Anthropology and Sociology

- Franz Boaz

Specifics of Social Science Research

Deals with:

- human beings
- social systems
- values, cultures
- interactions
- behaviours

Research methodologies and settings in Social Sciences

- Quantitative
- Qualitative

Research settings as regards health research

- Community-based
- Hospital-based

BASIC TENETS OF RESEARCH ETHICS

- Autonomy – the ability to freely determine one's own course of life, assumption that an autonomous person determines his/her course of action in accordance with a plan chosen by him/her
- Non-maleficence – above all or first do no harm
- Beneficence – all actions only for removal and prevention of harm; and for provision of benefits
- Justice – how social burden and benefits ought to be allocated (fairness, equity, distributive justice); resource allocation

Other relevant principles are:

- Essentiality
- Maximisation of public interest and social justice
- Knowledge, ability and commitment to do research
- Respect and protection of autonomy
- Privacy, anonymity and confidentiality
- Precautions and risk minimisation
- Non-exploitative
- Public domain
- Accountability and transparency
- Totality of responsibility

Translating ethics principles in practice

- Autonomy: informed consent, privacy and confidentiality
- Justice: relevance of the topic of enquiry, risk/benefit balance; gender balance, appropriate representation of various groups in studies

SECTION II
ABORTION RESEARCH ETHICS

Specifics of abortion research

The topic of enquiry deals with :

- Taboo and stigma attached
- Linkages with sexuality
- Issues around 'morality' of an act of abortion
- Values attached and judgments held
- Pregnancy is a result of engagement of two but abortion has to be faced ONLY by women
- Women's secondary status in general in the society.
- Sensitive/personal and intimate part of a person's life
- Women as research participants form a major constituency
- Issues related to privacy, acceptability and appropriateness
- The risk of singling out women included in studies
- Demands NOT ONLY sensitive but CREATIVE research approaches

International Ethics Guidelines

WHO guidelines specific to reproductive health research highlight

- Vulnerabilities
- Cultural specificities
- International/collaborative research initiatives

International Ethics Guidelines

Cover the following:

- Specific concerns when researching adolescents combined with reproductive health related matters.

Indian Ethics Guidelines

- ICMR (talks about new reproductive technologies etc.)
- CEHAT (general)
- Do not present specifics of reproductive health research

Stakeholders in research endeavours

Four party model and power equations

- Sponsors/funders
- Research institutes/researchers
- Gatekeepers
- Research participants

Power equations between parties are illustrated below :

Researcher and participant

- Fundamental
- Most discussed
- Unequal in favour of researcher
- Most scandals questioned this unequal relationship

Researcher and sponsor

- Unequal
- Recognition of rights of RPs
- TOR and limits of rights
- Who is the sponsor?
- Type of commitments by researcher to sponsor

Gatekeepers and participants

- The extent of gatekeepers rights to control participant's rights to participate in research
- Should researchers have plan to protect participants from gatekeepers?
- Do gatekeepers have ethical duty to protect participants?

Power relations and ethics guidelines

Ethical guidelines could be read in two ways:

- To what extent do they express ethical principles and provide guidance to resolve ethical problems encountered in research?
- How do they recognise power relationships, rights and responsibilities of various parties; and what kind of guidance do they provide in negotiating power relationships in the course of research?

Examples

Abortion research project which attempted to understanding abortion from women's perspectives

Objectives were as follows :
- To gain knowledge about the abortion act
- Decision-making process involved
- Choice of provider and expectation of quality of abortion care

Research setting and methodology

- Community-based (six villages – Maharashtra)
- Qualitative (FGDs, in-depth interviews, ranking – card exercise)
- Women, men and also abortion providers were participants.

Ethical issues and challenges

- Selection of the topic – rationale for topic; whose priority, in whose interest
- Selection of the research team
- Selection of the study area and ethical challenges
- Selection/choice of research methodology
- Entry in the community
  - informing the community about the topic of enquiry
  - Dealing with gatekeepers
1 Community leaders and elders as gatekeepers
2 Accessing women
  - Who have undergone abortions
- Attempting to learn reasons for abortion
1 Elders in the families, husbands – gatekeepers
2 Seeking women's consent
  - Multiple sittings and informed consent
- Conducting interviews – participation in the study
1 Time demanded of women
2 Privacy
3 Confidentiality
4 Compensation (individual research participants and community)
- Nature of the data obtained
  - Intimate/personal
  - Sensitive including 'socially unsanctioned' behaviours
- Management of the data
  - Recording, storage and access (team and others)
- Analysis and bringing the findings in the public domain
- Tremendous potential of breaching confidentiality
  - Selection of form and format to present study – academic and popular
  - Research participants' role in finalising the publications/material

Questions to explore regarding study :

Other issues?

Other ways to research the same issue?

Was the research done adequate?

Continuity in working with the community?

Researcher's links with the community (past and future)?

Quality of abortion care services

Objectives:

- To assess quality of abortion care services
- To develop and implement advocacy plan for improving women's access to safe abortion care services

Research setting and choice of methodology

- Hospital based
- Small scale, mix of quantitative and qualitative (sub sample)
- Providers and women users of abortion services

Study on quality of abortion care

Ethical issues and challenges

- Selection of the topic – rationale (whose priority? in whose interest?)
- Selection of the research team, training, perspectives, position on abortion as regards its 'ethics of act of an abortion'
- Selection of research methodology
  - Community vs Hospital-Based
- Entry in hospital
  - informing the doctors about the topic of enquiry, its relevance, purpose, methodology, what it means for them to participate?
  - Public sector hospitals – higher authorities, hierarchy within the hospitals - gatekeepers
- Accessing women (phase II – subsample)
  - Those who are seeking abortion care are in extremely vulnerable positions as power relationship with the provider are weak.
  - Dealing with gatekeepers – doctors, elders etc.
  - Seeking women's consent
  - Multiple sittings and informed consent
- Conducting interviews – participation in the study
  - Time demanded of doctors and women
  - Privacy
  - Confidentiality
  - Compensation (individual research participants – women and doctors; and medical community)
- Nature of the data obtained
  - "Sensitive" – inadequate quality of care
  - Illegal practices, illegitimate practices, indulgence in sex selective practices
  - Researcher's responsibilities towards participants and towards women at large

- Management of the data
  - Recording, storage and access (team and others)
- Analysis and bringing the findings in the public domain
  - Tremendous potential of breaching confidentiality
  - Selection of form and format – academic and popular
  - Research participants' role in finalising the publications/material – consultations, feedback from representatives

Questions

- Conceptualise research in tandem with advocacy? / Is it always possible?
- Other ways to handle ethical issues ?
- Alternative research designs?
- Anticipating ethical problems?
- Influence of institution's foundations, ideology, overall goals, orientation, functioning matters on research ?

Abortion incidence study

Objectives:

- To arrive at abortion incidence rates
- Abortion care sought
- Cost of abortion care incurred

Research setting and choice of methodology

- Community-based
- Statewide cross-sectional sample survey
- Women in reproductive age
- Ethical issues and challenges
- Selection of the topic – rationale (whose priority? in whose interest?)
- Selection of the research team, training, perspectives, position on abortion as regards its 'ethics of act of an abortion'
- Selection/choice of research methodology
  - Community-based sample survey
  - Institution's experience
  - Literature search and stocktaking of earlier methodologies
- Nature of the data obtained
  - Massive and of intimate nature, sex selective abortions
  - Illegal practices, illegitimate practices, indulgence in sex selective practices
- Optimal utilisation of the data
- Management of the data
  - Recording, storage and access (team and others)

- Analysis and bringing the findings in the public domain
  - Form and format – academic and popular
  - Research participants' role in finalising the publications/consultations and feedback from representatives needed.

Unique challenges

- Field researchers
  - facing ground realities is difficult, disparities
  - purpose of the research needs to be clear
  - face helplessness, stress
- Short time spans
- Gaining community confidence was difficult
- Community meetings
- Gaining informed consent difficult
- Tribal communities, other languages, involving translators

Challenges

- Lack of opportunities for systematic understanding of research ethics
- Near absence of any documentation of researchers experiences dealing with ethical dilemmas
- Apathy towards and suspicion about research ethics
- No culture of peer reviews leave alone ethics reviews
- No expertise easily available

Way forward

Individual/micro level
- Acknowledge there are issues and concerns
- Discuss and document them with peers and others

Macro level:

- To set up institutional mechanisms
  - To educate
  - To support
  - To review ethical content of research

Life cycle approach to research

A practical tool to deal with research ethics

What is a life cycle approach?

- Draws from the life cycle approach to 'health' of people
- Research endeavours too have various important stages in life span
    - Choosing the research theme (literature review)
    - Conceptualising research (sound goals, objectives, methodologies, risk/benefit analysis)
    - Designing the study and methodology (sampling, methods, tools of data collection)
    - Team composition (training – skills and perspectives; responsibilities towards research participants, and towards themselves)
    - Pilot test (informed consent, data utilisation)
    - Conduct of study
    - Data collection: informed consent, gatekeepers, privacy, confidentiality, deception, disclosure, debriefing
    - Data analysis: justice based analysis frameworks, caution: risk of stigmatisation
    - Presentation of data: confidentiality, anonymity while using pictures as well as data
    - Utilising research findings – public domain, with the research participants, feeding into policies

ieldwork in a Post-Colonial Anthropology

Rajni Palriwala

This is a brief overview of Professor Palriwala's field experience and thoughts on ethnographic research

Construction of anthropological framework

- Intensive fieldwork has been the basic constituting experience of anthropology
- Language is a key to understanding the life and thought of a people
- Mode of interaction & quality of relationships critical to data collection process
- Is the fieldworker a privileged eyewitness?
- Problematic assumption that the subsequent text created carried scientific authority, in part through effacing subjecthood of the researcher

Self-reflexivity in ethnographic construction

- Decolonisation demanded a new anthropological self-reflexivity
- Central to this was the assertion that anthropology no longer speaks with automatic authority for others defined as unable to speak for themselves
- The relationship between the studying self and the studied other had to be on a new footing
- The subjectivity of the researcher in shaping the study was to be acknowledged and continuously questioned

Fieldwork experience as methodology

- Despite volume of epistemological discussions, a negligence of the experience of intensive fieldwork
- First experience of fieldwork is a rite of passage in which learning is by doing
- Vexed issues of political economy of fieldwork. The relationship between the fieldworker and the informants should not be subsumed under issues of individual ethics
- Much of what the anthropologist understands is experience through direct, personal contact and relations established in the field
- Fieldworker interprets own experience and others' expressions of their experience for an imagined audience/readership (which may include the studied)
- Field constructed by the ethnographer in the process of fieldwork
- Double consciousness of the fieldworker. The insider who must remain on sidelines in order to report

Studying one's own society

- Five broad reasons were given earlier in the Indian context for studying one's own society: language, familiarity& empathy, responsibility to build up knowledge bank, affordability, ability to find others within own national space

- My own work relating to gender relations in Rajasthan was to study village women as women and as workers; this was new at the time and also part of my own political activism

- Living and working alone in an unknown village was not in accordance with the norms for young women; talking openly and in a friendly way to strangers and men could engender suspicion and hostility as I was infringing many local norms whether through ignorance or deliberate intent

- Followed local codes on deportment, dress, body language but allowed my background and preferences to show

- The anthropological observer (me) was the observed and vice versa

- Anthropologist learning from interactions between researcher and researched as well as interactions between the researched themselves

- Magic key lay in trying constantly and simultaneously to be an ethnographic ear and a woman with her own histories

Constructing the Field-1

- The village in Rajasthan and the debate about the construction of the village as a physical space, an integral whole and the methodologies to study it

- Fieldsite could not simply be mapped on paper and studied; the boundaries are neither physically nor socially absolute

- The hierarchical world that is Indian society, culture and village was a critical problem in mapping the field

- Many 'nativities', many cultural selves and socio-structural positionings. Have to construct a field through and around these hierarchies

- As a woman and a working anthropologist I had unexpected mobility

Constructing the Field -2

- Study of single parents, the family & the welfare state in The Netherlands. Of various classes, ages, marital status and gender

- In earlier anthropological work in urban settings the researcher entered a community, institution or organisation. Here study was of dispersed category

- Contemporary anthropologists build on previous studies

- Space, time & sociability organised very differently in Dutch culture

- Therefore little possibility of building gradual intimacy with informants to achieve familiarity like in Rajasthan

- Social life and professional life by appointment

- Notions of privacy, separation of work, home and leisure, individualism, compartmentalisation, few chance encounters

- The anthropologist and the field could ignore each other unlike in a small and closed community

- Fieldsite needed to be constructed much more consciously than in Rajasthan

- One to one conversations, life history narratives best modes of information retrieval

- Look at what is not directly present: living through representation, absent presence e. g. websites for single parents

Reverse anthropology? Language & mediations

- In Rajasthan it was gender that underlay tensions during fieldwork
- In The Netherlands it was colour, ethnic-cultural-language difference
- Learning the language; language as the key
- Language includes oral, body, facial gestures & expressions
- Interpreter's persona becomes critical to establishing the anthropological persona

Making relationships, breaking the silence

- Concern for privacy did not close off communication and information because of a variety of reasons: significance of the contract to tell life stories, respect for importance of research, compartmentalisation of social life, my outsider status etc.
- Since I focused on relatively marginal groups (both in Rajasthan and The Netherlands) for the informants the opportunity to be heard was important. Fieldworker facilitated breaking the silence by being interested, sympathetic and a patient listener and also someone who would leave

Concluding relationships

- In both fieldsites personal relationships grew between informants and resident anthropologist fieldworker
- These relationships framed the anthropological method
- Experience and relationships structure each other
- Continued exposition of fieldworkers experiential methodology is critical

Research with NGOs

Jyotsna Sivaramayya

This presentation has drawn from various projects regarding reproductive health of women, HIV/AIDS and recently with women home-based workers.

Focus

- Various difficulties and advantages in carrying out research with NGOs. All of this stems from my own experience and hence is extremely personalised.

Context

Refer to qualitative research or action-research that we have carried out with grassroots NGOs

- as project partners

- as facilitators who have provided an entry point in the community but have themselves not been concerned with the research.

- For many NGOs, research has a secondary status. They do not view it as an input that may be useful to them. Research is often felt to be irrelevant, waste of time, leads to nothing, etc.

- Many NGOs who are interested in carrying out research may not have the resources to do so.

- There are three main actors in the context – the researcher (outsider), the NGO (the link between the researcher and the community at least in the beginning) and the community.

Type of qualitative research

- There is a belief that the techniques that are used in qualitative research are more suitable for carrying out research with NGOs as the resources and technical expertise required for quantitative data analysis is not available with most grassroots NGOs.

- Many of the tools used for qualitative research in NGOs are participatory tools such as FGDs. In development research, participatory tools are assumed to be easy to use at the grassroot level.

- Research with NGOs often takes place within many constraints. Firstly the researcher does not have the sort of time that an anthropologist/sociologist would have to build a rapport with the community.

- Most of the research is very time bound, goal oriented and as a result the researcher does not have the luxury of revisiting the field or taking time out to examine the field at greater length.

- As a result research with NGOs often does not have the flexibility often associated with qualitative research.

- Many NGOs are also wary of researchers as they think that researchers use them but do not give anything back in return.
- The researcher has to train whoever is available for the project from the NGO

Why carry out research with NGOs?

- Through NGOs a researcher can get in touch with a large number of people quickly.
- NGOs provide an introduction to the community.
- In terms of action research, many NGOs have found it fruitful to carry out research that will aid their advocacy efforts.
- In situations where time is limited, researchers do not have the opportunity to establish rapport with the community. Hence, they have to rely on NGOs.
- NGOs also act as key informants.

Difficulties and Biases

- The relationship of the NGO with the community has a tremendous influence on the process and outcomes of the research in terms of years of work, ideology, social hierarchies, etc.
- Biases are also likely to creep in due to the intervention of the NGO and the community developing sensitivity about the issue, even if they do not subscribe to it. (Many will deny that they have gone in for sex selective abortion; most sex workers are aware that condoms prevent the spread of HIV). If the organisation has a particular image in the community, then people will often give the answers that they think that they are supposed to give.
- The respondents may not give views that are against the NGO
- Often the researcher is viewed as a means of communicating needs or discontentment to the NGO, which influences the responses.
- The fieldworkers may highlight what they feel is important.

Conflicts Between Activists and Researchers

- For NGOs, there is often a conflict that arises out of following a particular ideology or viewpoint on the one hand and of accepting various viewpoints as demanded by research on the other.
- The results that a researcher values are at times different from what the NGO wants. For instance the researcher is often interested in the subtleties and the ambiguities, while the NGO may want definite answers.
- Research may also mean going totally against the ethos of the organisation. In one instance the NGO had been working with the category of workers. For purposes of research, they had to be made aware of the need to stratify the workers according to religion, age, sex, region, etc. They also had to be made aware of the need to do this as a mixed group would not elicit any information.

Can Activists be Researchers?

- Retraining the community organiser / activist to become a listener rather than a speaker. This involves reversing roles.
- Learning to discard the organisation's view / ideology for purposes of research.
- Listening involves accepting views that are different from the organisation's.
- Taking criticism and negative comments from the community with whom you may have been working for the past many years.

- While many believe that people in the field have developed the skills to use participatory methods most effectively, this does not necessarily translate into being able to develop skills needed for research.

Dilemmas in the Field

- Often the researcher is faced with questions regarding the novelty of research i.e. what new is the researcher adding that is not already known.
- Researchers are also constantly faced with questions regarding the process and outcomes i.e. what are you going to do with all this.
- A pressure is felt to do something for the people but researchers are unable to do so, especially where issues of hunger, death, disability and discrimination are involved.
- Demands are also made by the people to provide services that the researcher is not able to provide.

To Conclude

- The process and outcome of research would depend on
    - The relationship of the NGO with the community
    - The nature of work being done by the NGO
    - The research issue