

01 Introduction to Qualitative Data Collection



May 2021

Adapted by Rammiza Akhtar from a training by Dr Tania de St Croix delivered for the Cornerstone project

Youth organisations are increasingly interested in demonstrating the effectiveness of their practice because of funders’ requirements and their own desire to understand the impact they are making.

Embedding research practices within youth work is possible as youth workers possess many of the skills required to be good researchers. This resource aims to highlight the ways in which qualitative data collection can be carried out by youth workers, in order to improve the organisation’s work and as evidence of the benefit that youth work has on the lives of young people.

Qualitative Data	Quantitative Data
Non-numerical, descriptive and conceptual data that reflects people’s experiences, perceptions, opinions etc.	Can be counted, measured, and expressed using numbers. Helps understand what .

Why Qualitative Research?

By opening up a meaningful and respectful dialogue, we can get a real insight to the benefits of youth work rather than reducing people’s experiences to statistics. Qualitative data can also be used to explain statistical results and **why** or **how** they were achieved.

Interviews

Interviews are the most common form of qualitative data collection, with a variety of types of interviews that can be carried out. The individual conducting the interview is called the researcher regardless of their position e.g., a youth worker conducting an interview would be referred to as the researcher.

Types of interviews

Structured	Semi-Structured	Focus Group	Peer/ Participatory	Paired	Photo Interview/ Photovoice	Other
List of questions written prior to the interview. Exactly the same questions are asked to all participants	A less prescriptive form of interviewing. It requires a plan - but is more conversational	An interview with three or more participants	An interview with someone in the same position as you, or from the same community e.g. a youth worker interviewing a youth worker or a young person interviewing people from their community	One researcher and two participants	Asking participant to take pictures around a theme and following this up with an interview	Guided tours, narrative interviews, video interviews etc.

Conducting An Interview

The process of carrying out an interview can be broadly split into three sections: planning the interview, conducting the interview, and afterwards - the post-interview stage. Before carrying out any research it is vital to consider the ethical implications of your work.

Planning the Interview	During the Interviewing	After the Interview
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify a research question: what do you aim to find out from your study?<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Keep it simple and useful, e.g. 'What do young people most value about the youth club?'• Consider who you want to interview and why?<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Keep you sample size small, manageable, diverse and representative.• Plan your interview questions<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Stick to 5-10 questions○ Choose between pre-written questions or more conversational statements.○ Consider the tone of your questions: could they be intrusive or insensitive?• Recording the interview?<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ If you plan on recording, ensure participants have consented to this.○ If taking notes, stay engaged with the conversation taking place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Start with a question that puts the person you interview at ease.• Build a rapport with them.• Listen and pay attention to what is being said.• Avoid interjecting too much.• Be willing to improvise and ask follow-up questions.• Don't be afraid to deviate from your plan.• End on a positive, hopeful question.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Take time to reflect on the interview shortly after it.• What key themes were highlighted?<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Find themes and patterns in the data• Learn from your own experience<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ What went well and what could be improved in conducting the interview?○ What should you ask in your next interview• Look out for our Intro to Qualitative Data Analysis brief for more information about making sense of the findings!

Ethical Considerations

- Gain informed consent from everyone taking part
- Participants should be able to withdraw consent at any stage
- Maintain anonymity of those involved, when appropriate
- Ensure all data collected is kept confidential

When do you have enough data?

Ideally you would interview a diverse range of participants until there are no new themes arising (that is called 'saturation'). However, you may be constrained by resources. You can often find out a great deal by interviewing 5-10 people, especially if the interviews are in some depth.

Focus Groups: A research method that is particularly suited for youth work. Requires you to follow the same principles as above. Focus groups encourage group discussion which can bring out more data, and are time efficient. Be mindful that in group settings confidentiality is more difficult to maintain. Set key rules prior to starting, highlighting the importance of being respectful and reminding everyone about confidentiality.

Other qualitative data collection tools



Observation – a way of gathering data on individuals, groups and interactions by listening and reflecting on behaviours and events.



Creative tools – using activities or sessions that are part of the project to as data for research or evaluation (e.g. film, photographs, song writing etc.).



Case studies – In-depth description of an individual story, to illustrate change. Can include a combination of findings from different sources and analysis.

Checklist

- Plan - Be clear on what you want to find out and then decide on the best method of data collection
- Ethics - Put ethical considerations first! – e.g. when using observation or case studies, ensure young people consent, and be very careful about sharing sensitive data (even if anonymized)
- Tone - Be enthusiastic, thoughtful and respectful whilst conducting research
- Reflect - Take time to think about what you did well, as well as what you could improve. Remember interviewing is a skill that takes practice
- Analysis – Take time to reflect. Find themes and patterns in the data (see our Intro to Qualitative Data Analysis brief)

Glossary

Data Analysis	Collecting and organising data in order to draw conclusions
Informed Consent	Explaining the purpose of the study and the role of the participant before they decide if they want to take part
Sample	Group of people selected to take part in a study
Research	Systematic investigation to establish facts, further understanding, and/or create new knowledge
Evaluation	Systematic process that helps develop an understanding of the outcomes of an initiative and/or the value that young people, youth workers, parents/carers and others place on the activities, their impacts and outcomes. It aims to prove and improve; evidence the initiative's results and improve its practice.

Additional Resources

Anecdote and Story: Real and Pertinent Evidence

<https://indefenceofyouthwork.com/2015/01/07/anecdote-and-story-real-and-pertinent-evidence/>

Evidencing the value of youth work

<https://www.youthimpact.uk/latest/news/evidencing-value-youth-work>

Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collector's Field Guide

<https://course.ccs.neu.edu/is4800sp12/resources/qualmethods.pdf>

Good Youth Work Practices – qualitative tools such as various art-based methods and sample interview guides that can be used to conduct interviews

<https://youthrex.com/qualitative-tools/>

More information about conducting a case study

https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/case_study

Questions to consider when designing youth work evaluation

<https://www.youthandpolicy.org/articles/valuing-and-evaluating-youth-work/>

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