

THREE KINDS OF QUALITATIVE DATA

INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

Open-ended questions and probes yield in-depth responses about people's experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings and knowledge. Data consist of verbatim quotations with sufficient context to be interpretable.

OBSERVATIONS

Fieldwork descriptions of activities, behaviours, actions, conversations, interpersonal interactions, organizational or community processes, or any other aspect of observable human experience. Data consist of field notes: rich, detailed descriptions, including the context within which the observations were made.

DOCUMENTS

Written materials and other documents from organizational, clinical, or program records; memoranda and correspondence; official publications and reports; personal diaries, letters, artistic works, photographs, and memorabilia; written responses to open-ended surveys. Data consist of excerpts from documents captured in a way that records and preserves context.

“The quality of qualitative data depends to a great extent on the methodological skill, sensitivity, and integrity of the researcher. Systematic and rigorous observation involves more than just being present and looking around. Skillful interviewing involves much more than just asking questions. Content analysis requires considerably more than just reading to see what's there. Generating useful and credible qualitative findings through observation, interviewing, and content analysis requires discipline, knowledge, training, practice, creativity, and hard work.”

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp 4-5.