

Qualitative Research Methods in Social Science: The Case Study Method

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What is qualitative research?



- Qualitative research uses **in-depth** studies of **small groups** of people to identify the issues, their stemming points, and the needs of the target group and the intricacies of the problem.
- It becomes more penetrating in character.
- The results of qualitative research are descriptive.
- Qualitative research unfolds the intricacies of human behaviour and action in heterogeneous settings.

Methods of qualitative research

The qualitative research techniques that can be put into use in social science research include,

- Direct Observation through participation,
- Case study
- Documenting oral history
- Narratives
- FGDs
- Phenomenology
- Grounded theory



Case Study: Defining the Method

- Case study is a robust research method encompassing a holistic, in-depth investigation.

Robert K. Yin defines the case study research method as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. (Yin, 1984, p. 23).





Proponents of Case Study Method:



- Charles Ragin and Howard S. Becker (1992) define case study as detailed and often subtle understandings of the social organization of everyday life and persons' experiences
- Well known case study researchers are
 - **Robert E. Stake**
 - **Helen Simons**
 - **Robert K. Yin**



Characteristics of Case Study Method:

- **Heuristic:** illuminates the researcher's understanding beyond original knowledge
- **Particularistic**
- **Descriptive**
- **Extensive in terms of time**
- **Intensive in terms of stuff**
- **Natural Environment**
- **Involves direct observation, interviews, insight into the deeper root**



Where to Use?



- Immersion of the researcher in the lives and concerns of the persons, communities, or organizations they study
- Minority groups are best addressed.
- Difficult cases are best handled through case study method
- Egs: Prisoners, AIDS Victims, Girls suffering from sexual abuse, Protestants, Delinquents, Criminals, Depression, Mental health patients



Famous Studies Using Case study Method in Social Science

- **Hughes's study**, which is subtitled *The Autobiography of a Drug Addict*, details the life experiences of Janet Clark, a young white woman living in a poor urban area.
- **Robert E. Park (1916)** used it to study ethnic minorities.
- **William Whyte's (1943)** of Chicago school used case study for Street Corner Society studies.
- **Erving Goffman (1959)**, used case studies to develop a dramaturgical perspective on social interaction.

Recent Instances of Famous Case Studies

- **Ruth Horowitz's (1983)** case study of a Hispanic community.
- **Elijah Anderson's (1990)** research in an African-American community.
- **Jaber Gubrium's (1993)** analysis of the life stories told to him by a group of elderly nursing home residents.
- **Sarah Thornton's (1996)** case study of dance clubs and raves in London.

Types of Case study Method

- **Yin (1984)** explains three types as **exploratory**, **descriptive** and **explanatory** case studies.
- **Exploratory case studies** set to explore any phenomenon in the data which serves as a point of interest to the researcher. A pilot study is considered an example of an exploratory case study.
- **Descriptive case studies** may be in a narrative form. An example of a descriptive case study is the journalistic description.
- **Explanatory case studies** are deployed for causal studies phenomena in very complex and multivariate cases.

Continued:

- McDonough and McDonough (1997) describes another two types of case study. They are:
Interpretive and Evaluative case studies
- The researcher aims to interpret the data by developing conceptual categories, supporting or challenging the assumptions made regarding them.
- In evaluative case studies, the researcher goes further by adding their judgement to the phenomena found in the data.

Stages in Case Study

- 6 “I”s
- **Identification of the case**
- **Interrogation about the context**
- **Information compilation**
- **Illustration documentations**
- **Interpretation of the information revealed**
- **Inference Drawing**



Process of Conducting

- Reaching out the Case
- Setting
- Rapport building
- Informality
- Spontaneity
- Devotion of time and space and patience
- Recording
- Transcription



Two types of describing data

- **Case Story:** Added to quantitative technique
- **Case Report:** For fully qualitative study



CASE STUDY A Life Transformed: A Journey from Slave to Self-sufficient

Provision of needed supports including vocational training and business coaching helped a survivor build a new life after being trafficked.



Dara looking out through a window after sharing his traumatizing life experience at a survivor network meeting. Photo © Burhan Elang / CTIP

"On the boat, I never thought I could come back home. You could only see water wherever you look. They mistreated us. If you don't work, you'll get beaten up", said Dara.

Challenge

Dara*, a 26-year-old man from Takeo province, who was promised by his broker that he would have a secure and decent job in Thailand, was enslaved for seven years on a fishing boat on east Malaysian waters. He was unable to leave the boat, not allowed to take breaks, and did not get enough food or sleep. He was forced to work days and nights without salary or health care and he lost all contact with his family in Cambodia. "It was so sad on the boat. And the work was very hard. We were forced to work days and nights without enough sleep", said Dara.

Intervention

Dara was rescued and safely returned to Cambodia in 2017 with support from the USAID Cambodia Countering Trafficking-in-Persons (CTIP) project implemented by Winrock International. Winrock's partner, the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC), worked closely with the authorities and accompanied Dara to his home in Takeo province. Dara was provided with psycho-social support through counselling, vocational training, job placement, and business coaching so that he could regain confidence and rebuild his life. "When I was rescued, I felt as if I was born again. I felt so relieved when I got back in Cambodia. I never expected I would be back in Cambodia again. I'm so happy to see my relatives again", said Dara.

Results

Dara is now living in Takeo province with his parents, wife and baby. He has secured a job in a factory in Phnom Penh, earning around 230 USD per month and his small business of pig-raising is growing. Dara's emotional status and physical appearance have improved remarkably since his return. He is feeling better and is happy to have found a decent job in Cambodia in addition to his growing pig-raising business.

Since 2015, the USAID-funded CTIP project has assisted 49,493 vulnerable people including victims of human trafficking like Dara through provision of livelihood support and other essential services.

*Survivor's real name has been changed.

A Case Study of Community Participation

Jacqueline D. Goodchilds and John Harding

One of our major interests in Springdale was in learning more about the way in which certain problems came to be defined as "community problems," and about the way in which such problems were dealt with by the community.¹ In the fall of 1952 we decided to undertake a detailed chronological study of a particular problem that had vexed the community for many years and that had recently been the subject of some remarkably successful community action. For this purpose interviews were arranged with ten different Springdale adults who had played key roles in the recent action.² Our case study is based primarily on these interviews, but it also leans heavily on information published in the Springdale weekly newspaper, observations made by our field workers at meetings of various organizations, and additional information gathered by field workers through informal contacts in the community over a period of several years. From these various complementary and overlapping sources of information it is possible to reconstruct with reasonable accuracy the events that actually occurred.

In presenting our case study we have had two additional purposes in mind. We wish to bring out clearly the roles of the various formal Springdale organizations involved at one time or another in this community problem, and we wish to illustrate in a specific context some of the activities characteristic of the various "participation types" described in the previous article. The latter purpose led us to supplement our basically qualitative account with a little quantitative analysis. We checked each name that occurred in our interviews and observation reports to determine whether the individual was one of the 547 interviewed in our community participation survey (the "B sample"), and consequently could be identified as to participation type. We found thirty classifiable participants in our records, twelve of Type 1 (Influential Officials), ten of Types 2 and 3 (Informal Leaders and Formal Leaders), and the remaining eight of Types 4 and 5 (Workers and Composite Attenders). A comparison of this distribution with the dis-

¹ This interest is discussed in Urie Bronfenbrenner and E. C. Devereux, Jr., "Interdisciplinary planning for team research on constructive community behavior," *Human Relations*, 1952, 5, 187-203. See especially pp. 197-198.

² Six of these interviews were conducted by Arthur J. Vidich, two by Jacqueline Goodchilds, and two by Richard Lawrence.

Case Report

- **An introduction to the case under study**
- **Rapport building to ease the environment**
- **Interrogation to the case**
- **Perception, opinion and Interpretation of the versions**
- **Inferences drawn**
- **Concluding comments**

Pros and Cons of Case Study

Pros	Cons
Navigation into difficult cases where many things remain hidden	Time consuming and needing immense patience
How and whys are easily delved out. It helps in developing critical and reflective thinking, problem solving, decision making among the nursing professionals.	Hard to draw definite cause-effect conclusions
Provides better insight into the case making treatment easier.	Hard to generalize from a single case
	Possible biases in data collection and interpretation (since single person gathers and analyzes the information)

Five misunderstandings about case study method

- **General, theoretical (context-independent) knowledge is more valuable than concrete, practical (context-dependent) knowledge.**
- **One cannot generalize on the basis of an individual case; therefore, the case study cannot contribute to scientific development.**
- **The case study is most useful for generating hypotheses; that is, in the first stage of a total research process, while other methods are more suitable for hypotheses testing and theory building.**
- **The case study contains a bias toward verification, that is, a tendency to confirm the researcher's preconceived notions.**
- **It is often difficult to summarize and develop general propositions and theories on the basis of specific case studies.**

The End