

Qualitative approach in mental health research

Mental health research is very challenging issue. Issues in mental health are often highly sensitive and require a degree of privacy. Field of mental health has utilized both the qualitative and quantitative study approaches to resolve various unsolved issues. Much often the two distinctive research approaches are presented in a conflicting manner that opposes each other's potential which likely to impede advancement in the field of research.

Qualitative research methodologies have a great scope of unleashing and exploring unknown quarters of mental health. Evidently initial studies in mental health were based on observation leading to development of theories. In fact Goffman's seminal study conducted in asylums on its resident inmates bestowed new avenues of systematizing medical practice of mental health. But however qualitative research methodologies failed to absorb the attention of the mental health research enthusiasts. It so happened that during the 20th century majority of research in mental health were based on quantitative research methodologies.

Qualitative methods are exploratory in nature and help to stimulate new ideas and better understanding of a particular phenomenon. Mental health problems are multifaceted in their etiology and often have far reaching consequences impacting the individual and society at large. The management of mental

health often requires an array of measures involving medication as well as social psychotherapeutic approaches which require detail understanding of the subjects under consideration, where qualitative studies prove fruitful. For example most often research makes use of in-depth interview to obtain respondents views on research question. The in depth interview provides the researcher with the opportunity to develop trust with the respondent as they are more often held privately which enables respondent to share details which otherwise the respondents might not have shared.

A number of analytical approaches have been used in mental health research including Meta synthesis, discourse analysis, ethnography, grounded theory, thematic analysis, interpretive phenomenological analysis, content analysis etc. Many often qualitative studies have been used as supportive to quantitative studies but as researcher gain more knowledge and skill in utilizing the qualitative research methodologies qualitative research will become more prominent.

As described above qualitative research has increasing significance in understanding mental health questions, therefore mental health researchers in Nepal should make use of this approach to better understand the various issues in mental health in our societal context.