

Use of Qualitative Research in College Mental Health

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Objectives

- Describe general uses of qualitative methods.
- Compare the defining features of quantitative and qualitative methods.
- Data collection techniques.
- Data analysis process.
- Healthy Minds Key Informant Interview Study.

How Do We Use Qualitative Methods in College Mental Health?

- Identify independent variables important to the phenomenon under study.
- Understand views, motivations, experiences of informants.
- Provide a comprehensive description; understand processes, mechanisms.
- Provide more in-depth information about possible underlying mechanisms for the relationships observed in our quantitative analyses.

Understand processes, mechanisms

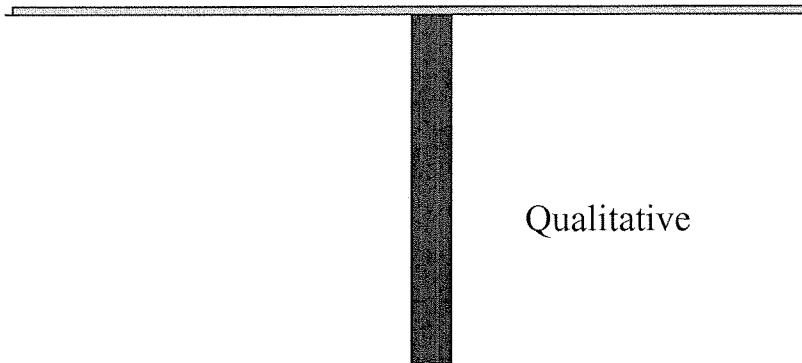
- Mixed methods study: Provide more in-depth information (understanding) about possible underlying mechanisms for the relationships or associations observed in a quantitative analyses.
 - Example: In a quantitative logistic regression, you find that a higher depression PHQ-9 score is associated with failing to graduate college. What is the mechanism for this? What is happening in their day-to-day functioning that causes academic failure?

Quantitative vs Qualitative

- Quantitative
 - Breadth through generalization. Top down approach.
 - Limited number of independent variables, and you might not use the most important. Unknown confounders?
 - Researcher-driven data collection
 - Step-by-step research process
 - Less time consuming
- Qualitative
 - Depth through detailed description and understanding.
 - Understand important variables.
 - Informant-driven data collection.
 - Iterative and interrelated research process
 - More time consuming!!

Quantitative vs Qualitative

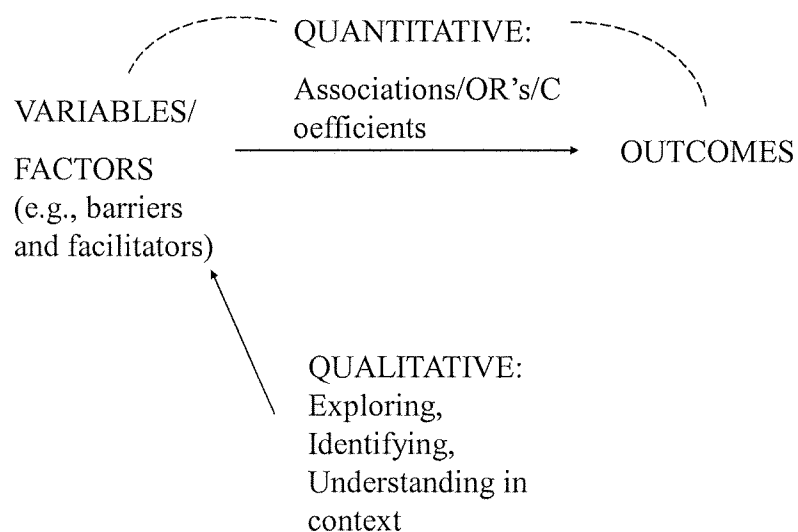
Quantitative



Qualitative Research Questions

- Don't think of variables that you're trying to relate to each other.
- Do think of identifying factors and understanding how they work. Underlying mechanisms?
- Questions can evolve.

Relating vs. Identifying Variables/ Factors



Sampling: Purposeful

- Goal: To understand a phenomenon, not to represent a target population.
- The selection of information-rich cases for intensive study. Commonly used in qualitative research.
- Selected types of purposeful sampling:
 - Maximum variation
 - Stratified
 - Typical case
 - Deviant case

Qualitative Interview Characteristics

- Usually open-ended questions to provide depth
- Degree of structure: Un-, semi-, and highly-structured
- Participant driven
- Face-to-face vs. telephone
- Dense data (Lots and Lots of data!)
 - ½ hour interview = 15 pages singled spaced.

When to use individual interviews

- When individual's experience and unique interpretation of it is of interest
- When a topic may be too sensitive to discuss in a focus group (e.g. Teens and sexuality)
- When respondents are too dissimilar to be meaningfully grouped
- When it is not practical to get multiple people together at the same time.

Qualitative Interviews

- Preparation for the interview
 - Interview guide (Will discuss in my example)
- Simultaneous management of intellectual and social dynamics
 - Establishing rapport
 - Listening skills
 - Thinking on your feet
 - Skills that mental health professionals naturally have!

Interviewing Techniques

Good interviewing techniques

- Careful listening
- Waiting
- Not leading the interviewee
- Being supportive

Bad interviewing techniques

- Asking too many questions for the time or type of participant
- Asking too many questions at once
- Asking closed-ended questions
- Asking leading questions
- Speaking rapidly, nervously, impatiently
- Interrupting

What is Data Analysis?

- Goal of Analysis: Facilitate the interpretation of your data. Make sense of your data.
- Data Analysis:
 - All techniques aimed at breaking data up and reconfiguring data.
 - To enable researcher to see something new in those data
 - To move from looking at data to looking for something specific in the data

Coding

- Preliminary coding or Open coding
 - Identify patterns and themes
- Codes are tools to work with. They are key to developing a consistent approach to the data.
- Code definitions should be clear and codes should be mutually exclusive.
- Create a codebook

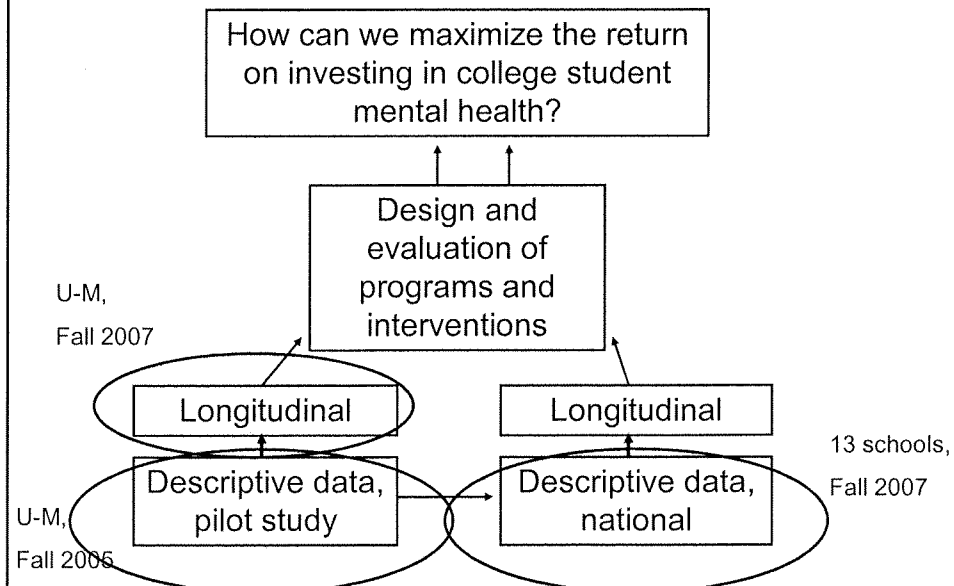
Next Steps

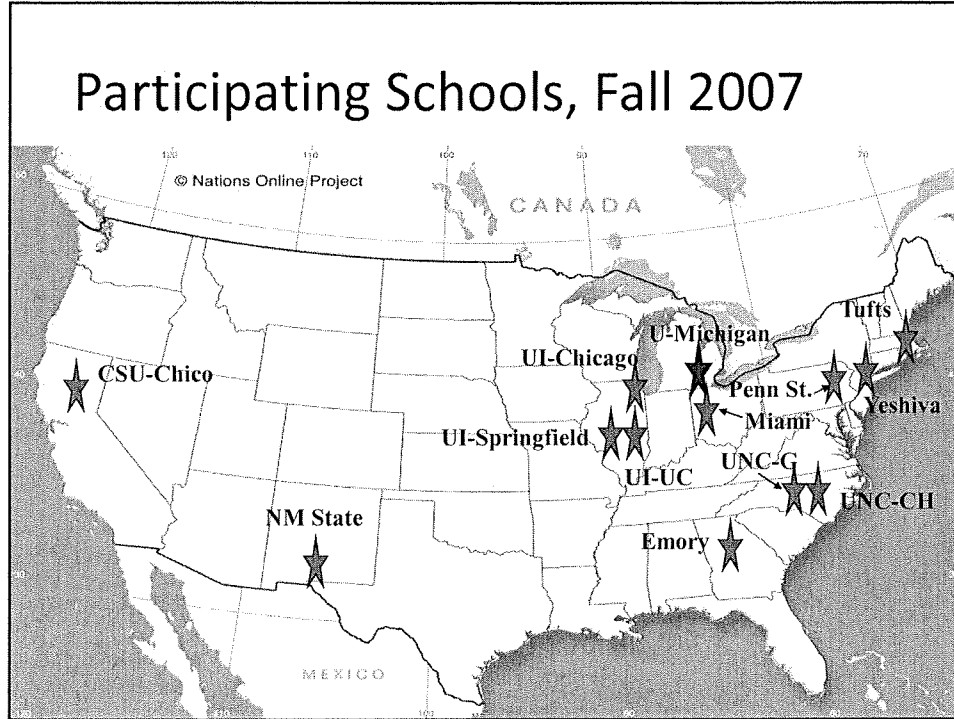
- Code data set
- Reorganize data
- Continue to memo
- Synthesis/Interpretation
 - Data Display
 - Conclusion Drawing and Verification
 - Writing

Background on the U of M-based Healthy Minds Study

PI: Daniel Eisenberg, PhD
Assistant Professor
Dept. of Health Policy and Management
U of M School of Public Health

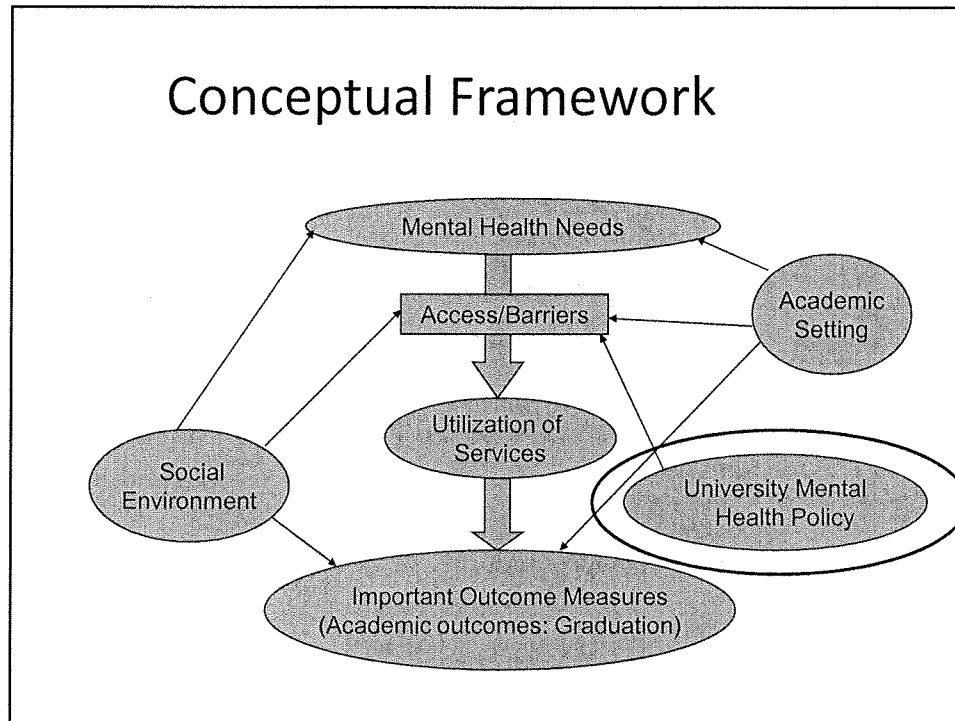
Broad Research Agenda





Brief Overview of my Healthy Minds Qualitative Study of College Counseling Centers

Mentor: Daniel Eisenberg, PhD
Assistant Professor
Dept. of Health Policy and Management
U of M School of Public Health.



Qualitative Study of College Counseling Centers

1. Initial questionnaire to collect campus-level information on resources, budgets, and specific mental health policies.
2. Qualitative, key informant interviews with administrators to answer several research goals:
 - Achieve a better understanding of the decision-making process regarding funding on each individual campus.
 - Achieve a better understanding of leadership support of mental health services on campus.

Qualitative Study of College Counseling Centers

- Progress to Date:
 - Recruited 10 out of 13 counseling center administrators involved in the Fall 2007 Healthy Minds Study to participate in this qualitative study.
 - 10 out of 10 administrators have completed the qualitative, key informant telephone interview.
 - Interviews are transcribed. I am currently in the coding phase of data analysis.

Why Qualitative?

- Research Goals:
 - Achieve a better understanding of the decision- making process regarding funding on each individual campus.
 - Achieve a better understanding of leadership support of mental health services on campus.
- Qualitative approach is a natural fit for these research goals.
 - Understand views, motivations, experiences of informants.
 - Provide a comprehensive description; understand processes, mechanisms.

Match Methods to Research Goals

- Why and how will particular methods and data sources yield data which will help you to answer your questions? (vs. I know how to do interviews so I'll do them.) (Mason p.27)
 - What data sources and methods of data generation are potentially available or appropriate? Practical?
 - We had administrative contacts, primarily counseling center directors, at each HM's school.
 - What can these methods and sources feasibly tell me?
 - Administrators at each school have personal experience with the substance of the research goals, including the decision making process regarding funding and leadership support of mental health services.

Semi-Structured Interview Guide Example

- Leadership support is important for maintaining and improving health services. What is your opinion regarding the support of your services from upper level administration?
- **Probes:**
 - In what objective ways has the administration demonstrated support of your counseling center?
 - Are there ways they could be more supportive?
 - Overall, what is your opinion of the financial funding of your center?
 - What are the top resources that you do not have, but are needed in order to provide quality care?
 - Why are administrators not more supportive of your counseling center/mental health service?

Examples of Interview Mistakes

- Leading statements:
 - “How does the university in general view mental health services? Mission central, or more ancillary in nature?”
- Asking too many closed ended questions at once:
 - “Is that the main outcome that you measure, the satisfaction? Do you measure mental health outcomes as well?”

Example Transcript Text

- ...the thing that happens with mental health is that it gets people's attention when bad things happen...so you kind of get people's attention and they give you stuff and then it sort of goes by the wayside. It's very difficult to keep the attention, and it's not...like, “Well, we don't want to deal with mental health,” it's just that they're very busy with other stuff. These are people that are running the show here, they're just very busy. An example of that here is...a very central recommendation from the task force was and is that we need to move student health and counseling together under one roof. We're in separate locations, very separate locations, distant locations on campus which makes it hard to coordinate services and it makes it hard for us to work together, it makes it hard for students to know, “Well, which place do I go?” It's just confusing.

Example Transcript Text

- There certainly are funding requests that have not been agreed to in the way of operating budget. Currently where we are is that we've increased in staffing to try to keep the wait list down, but we've grown so rapidly that it's created a need for more administration and sort of bureaucracy to manage the increase in staffing and we're not getting much help to help with that administrative need...And an increase in professional development funds has not been forthcoming.

Data Analysis

- Goal of Analysis: Facilitate the interpretation of, organize, and make sense of your data.

Steps:

1. Immersion:

- Reading through each 20-25 page transcript to get a sense of the whole. Take notes with pencil on first read through and the read without writing on second read through.
- Get a sense of each transcript as well as common themes across transcripts as well.

Data Analysis Cont.

2. Reduction:

- Develop a consistent approach to the data by developing a codebook with non-overlapping codes.
- Proceed with coding by at least two separate coders.

3. Synthesis

- Abstracting to themes after data is re-organized by code.
- Building an argument and writing paper.

References

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- Interviewing: Robert S. Weiss, *Learning from Strangers*, The Free Press, 1994.

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