**PART 1**

1. **INTRODUCTION**

Research using qualitative methods offers a unique perspective on complex issues in health and public health (Luciani et al, 2019). Isaacs (2014) finds quantitative methods particularly useful for studying social and behavioural aspects of public health. Despite being underutilized, qualitative methods can complement quantitative research, allowing for a deeper understanding of health and health services (Pope & Mays, 1995). Public health research using qualitative and mixed methods requires careful consideration of study design, data collection, and ethical considerations (Padgett, 2011).

This essay describes qualitative research, emphasizing its characteristics, features, and methodological unity. This article examines the diversity of qualitative methodologies, emphasizing how they can complement quantitative methodologies. The following sections provide qualitative insights into obesity research, examining studies that employ different qualitative approaches, such as in-depth interviews, grounded analysis, and ethnography. It provides a comprehensive understanding of qualitative research's value in unraveling the complexities of health and obesity through discussions of its strengths, methodologies, and potential limitations.

**2.0 NAVIGATING THE QUALITATIVE LANDSCAPE IN PUBLIC HEALTH AND HEALTH RESEARCH**

In public health and health research, physical, social, cultural, and environmental factors are considered (Gatchel & Schultz, 2012). An interpretive exploration of human experiences is at the heart of qualitative research (Jackson et al., 2007). In psychological science, qualitative research includes observations that traditional quantitative methods can't adequately deal with (Stiles, 2003). Fideli, 1993) defines qualitative research as noncontrolling, holistic, and case-oriented, about processes, open and flexible, diverse in methods, humanistic, inductive, and scientific.

Among the unique characteristics of qualitative research in public health is its ability to explore complex social and behavioural issues (Isaacs, 2014). In addition to providing an understanding of the personal meaning of stress factors and illnesses, it also examines the social and biographical contexts of health (Faltermaier, 1997). A qualitative research tradition has five distinct traditions, each of which has its own unique approach, making it applicable to different kinds of inquiry. In order for public health journals to remain relevant in the future, more qualitative research needs to be recognized and published (Stickley, 2022).

Draper (2004) and Camic (2003) both highlight qualitative research's innovative and diverse nature. Camic emphasizes its ability to complement quantitative methods. With an emphasis on in-depth interviews and group discussions, Gamboa (2003) provides a practical overview of qualitative data collection and analysis. As Hammersley (1981) emphasizes the importance of theory development, cultural understanding, and contextual analysis, he discusses the methodological principles of ethnography. Qualitative research can be applied across a wide range of fields and settings, as demonstrated by these studies.

There are differences between qualitative methodologies, but they are ultimately united by their common focus on understanding the subjective experiences and meanings of individuals (Slevitch, 2011). Consequently, they emphasize the importance of context and the researcher's role in interpreting the data (Gamboa, 2003) in their inductive approach to data collection and analysis. In qualitative research, this shared focus is balanced with the need for consistency and coherence (Holloway, 2003). By considering the philosophical underpinnings of different approaches and being context-sensitive (Holloway, 2003), this tension can be navigated. Sechrest (1995) encourages methodological pluralism, since qualitative and quantitative methods are not as clear-cut as they seem.

**3.0** **QUALITATIVE INSIGHTS ON HEALTH BEHAVIORS**

The study by (Ali et al., 2010) focused on Arab women in the United Arab Emirates at risk of type 2 diabetes. Cultural context and social ecological aspects influencing health behaviors emerged as themes relating to personal, social, and environmental factors. This study highlights the importance of culturally congruent interventions for women with type 2 diabetes in the UAE and possibly in other Arabian Gulf countries.

A qualitative analysis of obesity and treatment meanings among bariatric surgery candidates was conducted by da Silva & da Costa Maia (2012). Three main themes were identified in the study by interviewing morbidly obese patients: obesity, eating behaviors, and treatment. Participants perceived obesity as a hereditary trait, and bariatric surgery as a transformative, almost miraculous intervention, according to the findings. Study findings indicated a need to understand the perspectives of patients prior to and following bariatric surgery.

In another qualitative study, (Greener et al., 2010) examined conflicting perspectives on obesity causation and intervention among overweight individuals, health professionals, and policy makers in the United Kingdom. According to interviews, lay overweight respondents attribute obesity to personal shortcomings, while health professionals and policymakers emphasize socio-ecological factors.

**4.0 QUALITATIVE APPROACHES IN HEALTH RESEARCH: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES**

This study conducted by (Ali *et al*., 2010) employed a qualitative research design with a modified grounded theory approach to explore the attitudes of Emirati women at risk for type 2 diabetes towards weight management. The researchers conducted eight focus groups in primary healthcare centers in Al Ain, UAE, using purposive sampling. Data were collected through audiotaped sessions, transcribed, and analysed thematically using NVivo software. The study addressed three broad questions related to attitudes, perceived barriers, and intervention suggestions among the target population. The qualitative technique permitted in-depth study of participants' perspectives, vital in an environment with minimal prior knowledge. The improved grounded theory promoted hypothesis-driven analysis while keeping the iterative structure of grounded theory. Purposive sampling ensured diversity within the target population. However, the qualitative methodologies applied may be resource-intensive and subjective in interpretation. The study’s lies in capturing complex, contextual insights, but generalizability is a disadvantage as it restricts the broader application of findings to a wider population, potentially limiting the external validity and applicability of the study's insights beyond the specific context studied. The stringent measures taken, such as data triangulation, enhance the legitimacy and integrity of the conclusions.

Da Silva & da Costa Maia (2012) used interviews to explore the experiences, perceptions, and expectations of 30 patients undergoing bariatric surgery at a Portuguese obesity treatment center. The study employed a grounded analysis method, emphasizing emergent understanding from data, with theoretical sampling and constant comparative analysis. The grounded analysis method allowed for in-depth exploration, capturing nuanced patient perspectives on obesity and treatment. Theoretical sampling enabled ongoing refinement of research questions. The study's validity was enhanced by involving a second researcher as an auditor, but subjectivity in coding and interpretation is an issue because they can affect the reliability and applicability of the study's findings to a broader population or context, reducing the study's overall robustness and external validity. It offers rich, context-specific insights, although its generalizability may be limited. Detailed socio-demographic characterization adds depth to the findings, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of bariatric surgery patients.

A cross-sectional design was employed by Heintze et al. (2011) to examine 123 overweight German patients and 15 solo practitioners. To explore future healthcare visions for overweight and obesity, 37 in-depth interviews with GPs and patients were conducted using theoretical sampling. The free association narrative method and problem-centred questions predominated. A purposeful sampling approach enhances the richness of the study by providing insights from both GPs and patients. The open-ended questions allow for diverse perspectives. However, limited information about non-participants raises concern about representativeness as they pose a disadvantage of influencing the study's representativeness and the objectivity of data interpretation.. Qualitative content analysis ensures that the data is understood deeply, but coding can be subjective. Dual perspectives provide a comprehensive view of overweight and obesity-related healthcare structures.

Jones et al., (2007) conducted semi-structured one-on-one interviews with obese patients receiving weight management advice as part of their qualitative study. Interested participants expressed willingness to participate in the study and met the BMI criteria in primary care dietetic clinics in Ayrshire, West of Scotland. Interviews were conducted at participants' homes by researchers, including a dietitian and two health researchers, covering topics such as diet history and lifestyle changes. 24 interviews were conducted because of saturation, and informed consent, confidentiality, and ethical approval were ensured. By conducting personalized interviews with patients, the study provides rich and nuanced insights into their views. A variety of health backgrounds among interviewers enhances perspective diversity. Nevertheless, the sample size is relatively small, limiting generalizability. While saturation is efficient, it can also lead to a lack of nuances or minority perspectives. Although the constant comparison method supports rigorous analysis, subjectivity in coding can be an issue.

**5.0 CONCLUSION**

Qualitative research approaches give a broader knowledge of health-related events by studying individual experiences and contextual elements. The evaluated studies, spanning obesity in varied populations, demonstrated the depth and variety of qualitative techniques. Whether exploring cultural impacts, patient perceptions on bariatric surgery, contradictory viewpoints on obesity causation, or healthcare aspirations, qualitative methodologies gave insights impossible through quantitative means alone. The flexibility, breadth, and context sensitivity of qualitative research contribute greatly to health and public health research, offering a thorough understanding of complex issues and informing focused solutions adapted to varied populations.

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**PART 2**