

A Brief Introduction to Sampling in Qualitative Research

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Sampling: The Theory Behind It

- The idea behind sampling is that based on your sample of the population, you can draw inferences (generalize) about the population
- You never observe a population; only a sample
- For example, out of the Kosovo “population”, we are selecting some citizens to be interviewed.
- Based on our findings we can make inferences (and generalizations) about the entire “population”.

Differences in Qualitative & Quantitative Sampling

- Sampling differs in qualitative and quantitative research
- In quantitative, you select a RANDOM sample to make generalizations about the population
- In qualitative, you cannot do this because 1) you seek qualitative rather than quantitative findings; and 2) you usually study too few cases to make valid conclusions about the population (some cases are invariably missed because you cannot study them all)
- How you select your sample, therefore, has crucial implications for your research findings

Sampling in Qualitative Research

- So how do you select which cases to study in qualitative research?
- A commonly used / respected sampling method in qualitative research is “variation sampling”, also known as theoretical sampling or purposive sampling.
- **Becker (1998)** emphasizes the importance of sampling to include a **range** of variation: the **normal (average)**, as well as the **‘deviant’** and the **‘angelic’** extremes.
- These are selected based on your research questions and hypotheses

Selecting Cases for Variation

- If we only look at people that are the same, we may exclude trends
- So, we want to go back to Becker's recommendation, and select a **range** of variation: the **normal (average)**, as well as the **'deviant'** (contradicting our hypothesis) and the **'angelic'** extremes (supporting our hypothesis).
- Then we will be able to draw generalizations about all municipalities as we have looked at the strongest, weakest, and average cases (as relevant to our questions).