An Exploration of Pharmacy Education Researchers' Perceptions of and Experiences Conducting Qualitative Research: Challenges and Benefits.

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BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE
The purpose of this study was to investigate pharmacy education researchers’ (i.e., faculty, postdoctoral fellows, pharmacy/graduate students, and residents) experiences conducting qualitative research (including challenges and barriers) and their perceptions of qualitative research in pharmacy education (QRPE).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
1) What concerns impede pharmacy educators from employing QRPE?
2) What are the barriers and challenges of employing QRPE?
3) What are pharmacy educators’ perceptions of the benefits of employing QR?

METHODS
• One-time, in-depth interviews were conducted with 19 participants using a semi-structured protocol.

Participation Criteria: (a) identified as a pharmacy faculty, postdoctoral fellow/scholar, resident, graduate student; and/or staff member; (b) affiliated with an accredited school/college of pharmacy; and (c) experience conducting pharmacy educational research (e.g. quantitative, qualitative, and/or mixed methods).

DEMOGRAPHICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Employment/Trainee Classification</th>
<th>Conducted Qualitative Research</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Faculty or Staff</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=15 (78.9%)</td>
<td>n=15 (78.9%)</td>
<td>n=16 (84.2%)</td>
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Educational Attainment Level
- Doctoral or Professional degree: n=19 (100%)

CONCLUSIONS
Despite the increasing application of rigorous qualitative approaches in many health science fields today, it mostly remains underutilized in pharmacy. In an attempt to catalog pharmacy education researchers’ perceptions of and experiences conducting qualitative research, we provide empirical evidence to an anecdotal dialogue that has long existed in pharmacy education regarding qualitative research. The findings from this study are especially useful in pharmacy and pharmaceutical sciences as the need to address complex problems intensify in a rapidly evolving environment. Whether as a standalone method or combined with quantitative approaches, qualitative approaches may provide a suitable solution to advance pharmacy educational research.

RESULTS

Pharmacy Educators’ Qualitative Training Experiences
- Received formal qualitative research training via courses taken to fulfill degree requirements
- Received “on the job training”: Informal qualitative research training

“Informal training has been basically I guess you'd call it immersion. I've gotten involved with projects that involved qualitative approaches and so I learned by going through that process what I know about qualitative research... I've been through two projects like that. In each case I learned from others who were more experienced how qualitative work was done.” (Armando, faculty member)

Barriers and Challenges to Considering and Conducting Qualitative Research in Pharmacy Education
- “Barrier to entry”: Lack of training and exposure.
- Recruitment of participants and collecting data
- Resources needed to analyze qualitative data (e.g. time, people, funds)
- Perceptions of the lack of acceptability, value, and appreciation of qualitative research in pharmacy education

“As pharmacists, we're taught to be so discrete and about numbers and things that are measurable, that sometimes qualitative research gets put in the backseat compared to everything else...Because I think some people do understand it, but they don't appreciate it. Some people don't understand it, and don't appreciate it. I think some people know what you're doing and they understand what you're doing; they just don't think it's robust. Where some people don't even know what it is, I mean wouldn't even know what it is to even have the capacity to appreciate it.” (Willie, faculty member)

Perceived Benefits of Employing Qualitative Research in Pharmacy Education
- Exploratory nature of qualitative research and the need to answer complex research problems
- The richness of qualitative data
- Answering questions quantitative research may not be best positioned to answer
- Providing a holistic view of a problem or solution via mixed methods

“I think a lot of the questions that we need to ask can't be answered quantitatively. I still kind of come to this with bias that quantitative research answers some questions better than qualitative research can, but there’s definitely a place for qualitative research.” (Gwendolyn, faculty member)