

Qualitative Research Methodologies and Epistemologies in the Field of Corruption

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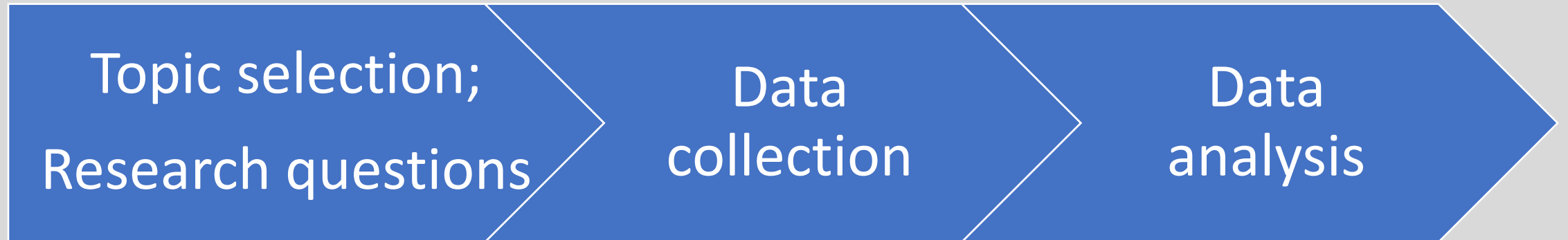
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Focus

- Conducting empirical (criminological) research on corruption
- Qualitative methods and its goals
- Research process





Particular challenges when studying corruption

- Estimated high dark figures
- No “direct” victims
- Social desirability
- Organizational settings and opportunities
- High profile cases and well-known actors

Rationale for using qualitative methods

- **Offenders (and organizations)**

- Decision-making processes
 - situational prevention
- Interpretation of opportunities
 - disruption of activities
- Interpretation of costs and benefits
 - raise costs/risks
- Interpretation of law enforcement
 - awareness, training, regulation
- Neutralization techniques
 - awareness, training, regulation
- Perceived strains and pressures
 - mezzo level interventions
- Self-image
 - impact of criminal procedure
- Criminal careers and recidivism
 - impact of sentences

Rationale for using qualitative methods

- **Law enforcement (and organizations)**

- Decision-making processes
- Law in action
- Professional subcultures
- Resource allocation
- Perceived effectiveness
- Improvement suggestions

- Training
- Awareness raising
- Capture and disfunctions
- Quality of practices
- Value for money
- Accountability
- Transparency

Data collection: interviews

- The participants' points of view, experiences or expertise; interpretation of opportunities, resources, strains, etc.
- A meaningful interaction (⊘ interrogation)

Offenders

- Access and recruitment challenges
- Perceptions or indirect questioning
- Forensic samples
- Power imbalance
- ...

Law enforcers

- Access and recruitment challenges
- Official talk
- Concerns with “negative” results
- Power imbalance
- ...

Data collection: (participant) observation

- Access to the participants' contexts, first hand observation of activities, talk, interactions, physical and symbolic context
- Naturalistic approach
- Court room observation; police work; regulatory agencies

Offenders

- Access and recruitment challenges
- ...

Law enforcers

- Access and recruitment challenges
- Observer's impact on activities
 - Insider/outsider
- Concerns with "negative" results
 - Power imbalance
- ...

Data collection: document analysis

- Access to available (or classified) data documenting decision making, organizational and professional subcultures, structures and hierarchies
- Non-intrusive approach
- Emails and correspondence, reports, biographies, police and court files

Offenders

- Public/available documents
- Freedom of information Act
- Press and media news
- Former staff, whistle-blowers
- Public hearings
- ...

Law enforcers

- Public/available documents
- Freedom of information Act
 - Press and media news
 - Case files
 - ...



Ethical dilemmas

- “do no harm” to participants as ethical principle: physical, psychological, manipulation, especially when researching criminal activity, victimization, social exclusion, etc...
- Informed consent, anonymity, covert research as an exception
- “This may not be applied to all situations, for example, where researchers are uncovering corruption (...). Researchers need not work to minimise harm to the corporate or institutional entities responsible for the damage.” (<https://www.britsoccrim.org/ethics/>)
- Well-known people and cases
- Powerful participants wanting to “control” the research and its results
- Protection of the researcher him/herself



Conclusions

- Added value of using qualitative methodologies
- Influence on policy making
- Integration with quantitative data: mixed methods
- Challenges
- Rigour AND adaptability
- Recognize power imbalances between specific participants and the researcher



Interviewing Elites, Experts and the Powerful in Criminology

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Thank you for your attention

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