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PERSPECTIVE

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ETHICS VERSUS THE NATURE OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Joko Gunawan*

Diploma Nursing Study Program, Politeknik Kesehatan Kementerian Kesehatan Pangkal Pinang, Bangka Belitung, Indonesia

*Corresponding author:

Joko Gunawan, RN

Diploma Nursing Study Program, Politeknik Kesehatan Kementerian Kesehatan Pangkal Pinang
Jl. Melati Kabupaten Belitung, Kepulauan Bangka Belitung 33684, Indonesia

E-mail: joe_gunawan@ymail.com

The whole is greater than the sum of its part. This is what researchers say about qualitative research. Understanding human problem in a holistic picture, building a complex phenomenon, analyzing words, and conducting a study in a natural setting are the nature of qualitative research.¹ We cannot even compare the qualitative world to another world, which is quantitative research. However, many ethical issues are raised regarding the nature of it. This paper is noted to discuss the issues for consideration.

We cannot deny that most of the ethics board members are only familiar with quantitative research. Therefore, they tend to argue and debate about qualitative based on quantitative perspectives. However, the debate will never end until they have the same understanding.

Firstly, the ethics board members may argue that the qualitative research is often used a small group of samples than large samples. This is one of issues that has always been asked. It seems that few samples will not be useful, in terms of generality. It may be the weakness of qualitative research. But we may distinguish between qualitative and quantitative world, which quantitative has the principle to achieve the universal knowledge. Otherwise, qualitative cannot do that. Qualitative research tends to generalize in the way of providing knowledge of human experiences with the uniqueness. The findings can be used for others having the similar situation with the study, particularly in nursing practice, which nurses take care different humans with different characteristics.

Secondly, the subjectivity of qualitative research has always been

compromised, in terms of lack of objectivity. This is true that qualitative researchers hold an interpretive perspective, however, it may lead to misunderstanding. In fact, researchers see the object reality based on the real data of the object, but the way they interpret the data is based on their perspective, background, and their belief. It could be said that “we judge the data with our glasses”, surely different from one another. It is different from bias, which we have the background of information before interpreting the data, and then selectively choosing the data that fit your thought, which is considered unprofessional.

Thirdly, the ethics board members may think that the qualitative research is not using scientific methods, such as interview and focus group. We may think again what kind of the scientific method is actually scientific. We know that the interview is flexible, unstructured, open, and unorganized. But it could be misinterpretation. The qualitative researchers are very discipline, systematic, and analytic, and they see the data critically in perspective.² In addition, before collecting data, they do an informed consent, clearly describe how the interview will be recorded and how to keep confidentiality.

Fourthly, the qualitative researchers may find it difficult to justify sample size, especially when they do not know who will be the key informants. It may be more and more informants depending on saturation

of the data. To deal with the situation, the researchers may come back and see the research objectives and questions, sampling criteria, and study approaches. For instance, case study and phenomenology should be different in sample size.

Finally, there is nothing wrong with the ethical issues in the nature of qualitative research if we have the same basic of the understanding and are able to confirm concisely how we design our research.

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This study is the original work of the corresponding author.

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