



Can't You Count?

Using Numbers in Qualitative Evaluations

Jerome Gallagher and Jennifer Kuzara

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Three ways to deal with counting of qualitative data in evaluations...



1. Don't Count
(Presence/absence)

2. Semi-Quantification
(few, many, most)

3. Quantification
(1,2,3...; 7 out of 10;
52%; etc.)





Key Informant Interviews

Government Bureaucats + local aristocats about Implementing Purrtner cats



Evaluation Findings

“Government bureaucats and local aristocats identified collaboration among implementing purrtner cats (IPCs) as an area that could be improved during the Cat Condo project implementation.”

or

*“**Many** of the government bureaucats and local aristocats interviewed identified collaboration among the IPCs as an area that could be improved during the Cat Condo project implementation.”*

or

*“**Eight of the 10** government bureaucats interviewed and **10 of the 25** aristocats interviewed identified collaboration among the IPCs as an area that could be improved during the Cat Condo project implementation.”*

or

*“**Eighty percent** of government bureaucats interviewed and **40%** of the aristocats interviewed identified collaboration among the IPCs as an area that could be improved during the Cat Condo project implementation.”*

6

To Quantify or not to Quantify (qualitative focus group and interview data)

How quantification might help...

1. Improves precision of statements that are quantitative in nature.
2. Adds transparency about data and findings, and helps defend against claims of cherry picking.
3. Helps convey internal generalizability of findings.
4. Helps in identifying patterns.

How quantification might hurt...

1. Suggests a precision and objectivity of measurement that is not always credible.
2. If everyone was not asked the same question or didn't answer in a standardized way, numbers may misrepresent the data.
3. Can lead to inappropriate inferences about a larger population (external generalizability).
4. Detracts from and reduces the nuance in the data and separates each piece of evidence from its context.

7



What Do You Think?

1. In what situations do you find it more or less useful to quantify your qualitative data?
2. What factors do you consider when deciding whether or not to quantify your qualitative data?
3. Has this been an issue with the audience for your evaluation? How did you resolve the issue?

8

What does the literature say...

The literature says you should find a new gimmick. Cat photos are so 2016.



Suggestions from the editors of *Addiction* (2014):

1. Include a clear statement reminding readers that no inferences can be drawn about the prevalence of phenomena observed beyond the sample.
2. By and large, limit reporting of raw numbers to features that have been assessed for all the participants in a manner that allows for comparison.
3. Avoid percentages unless the study has a sample size greater than 50 or thereabouts.
4. Do not use terms that have a specific quantitative meaning, e.g. 'majority', 'minority', 'most', without providing a specific justification for why such language is appropriate.
5. If some form of semi-quantification is required, it is often better to use appropriately non-specific terms such as: 'a few', 'several', 'some', 'many' etc. As with point 4, explicit justification should always be given.

9

References

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Neale, Joanne, Miller P., West R. Reporting quantitative information in qualitative research: guidance for authors and reviewers. *Addiction*, 109, 175–176.

Sandelowski Margarete. Real qualitative researchers do not count: the use of numbers in qualitative research. *Research in Nursing & Health*, 2001; 24: 2–10.

Sandelowski M., Voils C. I., Knafelz G. On quantizing. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 2009; 3: 208–22.

Stewart, D., Shamdasani, P., and D. Rook. Focus Groups Theory and Practice (2nd Ed). Applied Social Research Methods Srs. Vol. 20, 2006.

Capybaras are the new cat.



10