Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Technique in Assessing Oral Health Policy

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OBJECTIVES:

- To serve as a description of the methodology of document analysis and its relevance to policy development and reform
- To generate data for a larger study

BACKGROUND:

- Policy analysis relies on specific research strategies designed for information gathering and evaluation
- There is a need to better understand the methodology behind various forms of qualitative research such as document analysis
- This study was part of a larger research project carried out at Dalhousie University
- The two documents analyzed in this study were oral health related government documents from the province of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL)

METHODS:

- Literature Search
  - Identified relevant sources using key words in various search engines and databases
  - Generated detailed methodology for document analysis and created a form to aid in the analysis for this case
- Applied the process adapted from the conventional analysis strategy described by Hsieh and Shannon (2005) to manually analyze the NL documents of interest
  - Generated a concept map for each document
- Employed NVivo 8 software to further analyze the NL documents
  - Generated code books to identify how information was coded
  - Generated code frequency tables for each document
- Confirmed findings
  - Multiple coders
  - Triangulation of findings from manual and computer assisted analyses

RESULTS:

- Document analysis is valuable for collecting qualitative data
- Due to the wide variation in documents, some minor modifications may be needed when applying the developed methodology to other types of document sources
- Qualitative research software such as NVivo 8 is helpful in analyzing document content and manipulating data, however an element of user interpretation still exists
- Not all themes found in the NL documents can be directly applied to populations outside of NL, but many can be modified for use in other areas

DISCUSSION:

- Document analysis is a valid research strategy with considerable merit as a methodology for policy evaluation and reform
- Examining documents has both benefits and limitations that the analyzer should be aware of
- Multiple analyzers and triangulation should be employed to confirm findings when carrying out document analysis
- Additional work is needed to further define and promote qualitative research strategies
  - Increase people’s understanding of them as research techniques
  - Strengthen their credibility in policy development and reform

CONCLUSION:

- Document analysis is valuable for collecting qualitative data

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