

EDITOR'S COMMENT

There is increasing emphasis today on evidence based practices in the field of community based rehabilitation (CBR), so that the field can grow and develop further, and fulfil its promises of bringing about 'real' changes in the lives of people with disabilities. Research and evaluation in CBR will necessarily play a key role in contributing to the body of evidence based practices. However, there is some debate about what type of research - quantitative or qualitative - is more suitable for CBR.

Quantitative research is important when there is need to identify numerical trends of populations, to establish cause-and-effect relationships, to identify major differences between populations, to establish base line data and to make statistical generalisations of findings to other similar populations. It is also useful to know the absolute numbers when there is a need to provision resources cost-effectively.

Qualitative research on the other hand, helps to study amorphous data on contextual and culture specific issues, including people's behaviour, their attitudes, beliefs and perceptions. It is usually less expensive and less time-consuming than quantitative research and more useful when the need of the researcher is to develop capacity in the organisation or plan future interventions. However, qualitative research requires highly skilled researchers with skills to elicit information from a variety of stakeholders, to reduce bias to a minimum and to interpret findings appropriately.

In the earlier years, practitioners in the field of disability followed largely a service delivery approach borrowed from the medical model. Accordingly, research and evaluation tended to be more quantitative in nature, because traditionally the medical model, strong in service delivery, required identifying trend lines to evolve best delivery systems. Today however, the field of disability rehabilitation encompasses broader issues of development, based on a social model and focuses on contextual issues and participation. With this change in perception, qualitative research assumes importance because it can study the differences in behaviour of people and choose appropriate strategies for planning.

The choice of quantitative or qualitative methods in research depends on the questions that the researcher needs to answer. For example, if provisioning of resources is the matter to be decided, then quantitative methods may be more useful. If organisational and project development is what is needed, then a researcher would opt for qualitative methods. Often the two approaches are used together to complement each other.

In a field like CBR, with growing emphasis on social approaches to disability issues, and the need to evolve cost-effective methods, a judicious combination of qualitative and quantitative research may be the need of the hour.

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**PATHFINDERS : TOWARDS FULL PARTICIPATION AND EQUALITY
OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE ESCAP REGION**

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

This publication provides an avenue for sharing ideas and experiences and for disseminating examples of good practice towards the achievement of full participation and equality of persons with disabilities in the Asian and Pacific region. The case studies presented cover the policy categories of national coordination; legislation; public awareness and accessibility; education; training and employment; prevention of causes of disability; rehabilitation, including community based rehabilitation and health and social development; and self-help organisations. Examples of good practice have been presented from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Hong Kong, China, India, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam.

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