

Editorial**Mixed methods research: A fashion or a need?**

In the course of my teaching and nursing practice, students have asked me the same questions over and over: “What research method is the best?” “You know, I love qualitative studies”, or “I would like to use mixed methods”. I have replied, “What is/are your research question(s)?” “What is your study purpose?” Research is not a fashion; it is not the matter of liking or disliking. It is not a matter of a good versus a bad research method. A strong study is driven by a well-defined study purpose and good and clear research question (1, 2). A study is not strong because of the type of method or methodology. You can choose mixed methods as a strong method hoping to find answers for gap(s) in practice; however, you will not be successful if you are unable to draft a good and clear research question. As researchers we are obliged to do quality research on the phenomena of concern, but a method by itself does not guarantee valid and reliable outcomes.

In nursing research the use of mixed methods (MM) is a fast-growing approach that enables researchers to study complex health issues in health care settings (2). To provide good care to the public at large, there is an immediate need to use all different research methods, including MMR (Mixed Methods Research). In MMR researchers collect and analyze data, and integrating the findings using two or more qualitative and/or quantitative strategies concurrently or

sequentially to answer the research question(s) and/or test a hypothesis/ or hypotheses in a single study (3-8). There are five purposes for conducting MMR: triangulation, complementarity, development, initiation and expansion (7, 9).

In conducting MMR, researchers should be cautious and consider factors such as their knowledge of the qualitative and quantitative methods, time, and money. Doing a good and strong qualitative or quantitative study is worth doing as oppose a weak MM one. The first step is to draft good question(s) (3-8). The second step is to have a clear data collection strategy. In a high- quality MM study, it is important to distinguish between the primary and the secondary data collection strategies. The secondary data collection strategy cannot stand alone but instead supports the primary strategy (3-9). The third step is to choose the right primary (main) theoretical drive, which is determined by the research question(s) or hypothesis /hypotheses. The role of the secondary component to the study is to enhance the description or explanation of a tentative emergent assumption (3-9).

MM like every method has strengths and weakness. It can be used to increase understanding of phenomena that might be uncovered by using a single method, and provide stronger evidence for a conclusion. It can also increase validity and the generalizability of the study outcomes, and

provides complete knowledge to inform theory and practice (10). However, researchers using MM need extensive knowledge of two or more research methods and must understand how to mix them properly. MMR is also more expensive, and time consuming. Because of the complexity of MMR, it has been suggested that novice researchers work with an experienced research team (10) rather than individually. Last but not least, although there is an emergent call for MMR in filling gaps in nursing knowledge and practice, researchers should make every effort to apply it appropriately and conduct studies rigorously so that MMR can fulfil its promise.

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