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2-Spirits Health Journal

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Recommendations for Writing and Reporting Qualitative Research

What is qualitative research?

Qualitative research is a type of scientific inquiry that aims to understand and interpret human experiences, behaviors, and the meanings they attribute to them. It seeks to answer questions about the 'why,' 'how,' and 'what' of experience underpinning a chosen topic of study.

Qualitative research, unlike quantitative research, uses non-numerical data such as field notes, interviews and focus groups, written documents, and photographs and videos to explore scientific significance.

In qualitative research, context is key, allowing for behaviours to be understood in their real world setting. Qualitative research first gathers data, then develops theories from patterns observed in the data. Its approach is holistic, examining multiple different perspectives to reach as complete a picture as possible.

Why are qualitative research standards important?

Qualitative research plays an increasingly important role in medical and health-related advancements. As such, standardized indicators of rigorous qualitative research are needed within these disciplines. Clear standards help researchers, editors, reviewers and practitioners critically evaluate qualitative studies and apply their results in both theoretical and material settings.

The following recommendations, adapted from the work of O'Brien, Harris, Beckman, Reed and Cook (2014), are an attempt to establish such standards. Organized according to the sections of a typical research manuscript, these recommendations are intended to guide researchers in developing their study and preparing their manuscript for submission.

The 21 recommendations

I. Title and abstract

These sections should provide a concise overview of the entire study, allowing readers to quickly identify the research topic and key findings and assess the study's relevance (as these sections may be the only ones read).

#1: Title

Provides a concise description of the nature and topic of the study. It is recommended that authors identify whether the study is qualitative, indicate its approaches (e.g., ethnography), and outline its data collection methods (e.g., focus groups).

#2: Abstract

Summarizes the study's key elements (background, purpose, methods, results, and conclusions) in accordance with the Journal's abstract formatting guidelines.

II. **Introduction**

This section establishes the research problem, reviews existing literature (if applicable), and states the study's objectives or research questions. The introduction should justify the study and provide context for the reader.

#3: Problem formulation

Lays out the significance of the problem/phenomenon studied and serves as a review of relevant theory and empirical work, offering a problem statement.

#4: Purpose and research question

Outlines the purpose of the study and specific objectives and/or questions that guide it.

III. **Methods**

This section details the research design, data collection (e.g., interviews), and analysis procedures (e.g., thematic analysis). It is meant to provide a clear roadmap to the study, ensuring its rigor, trustworthiness, and that research methods might be replicated.

#5: Qualitative approach and research paradigm

Identifies the study’s qualitative approaches (e.g., ethnography, case study), guiding theories (if applicable), and research paradigms (e.g., Indigenist). It is recommended that authors include their rationale for using a specific paradigm within the context of their study.

#6: Researcher characteristics and reflexivity

Describes researcher characteristics that may influence the research, including personal attributes, qualifications, relationship with participants, assumptions, and positionality, as well as any potential or actual interaction between these characteristics and the research questions, approach, methods, results and/or transferability.

#7: Context

Provides an overview of the study's setting/site and any other salient contextual factors.

#8: Sampling strategy

Outlines how and why research participants, documents, or events were selected, the criteria used to determine when no further sampling was necessary (e.g., sampling saturation), and the rationale for these sampling choices.

#9: Ethical issues pertaining to human subjects

Provides documentation of approval by the appropriate ethics review board and participant consent, as well as other confidentiality and data security issues (e.g., community ownership of data and research findings).

#10: Data collection methods

Describes the types of data collected and data collection procedures, including start and stop dates of data collection and analysis, incremental iterative processes, triangulation of sources/methods,and modification of procedures in response to evolving study findings. Rationale for why these methods were used should be offered.

#11: Data collection instruments and technologies

Describes the instruments used for data collection (e.g., questionnaires), including whether they are included in the appendices (if appropriate), the devices used (e.g., audio recorders), and any changes made to instruments over the course of the study.

#12: Units of study

Describes the number of participants and their relevant characteristics, documents, or events included in the study, and the level of participation (this may also be reported in the Results section).

#13: Data processing

Outlines the methods used to process data before and during analysis, including transcription, data entry, data management and security, verification of data integrity, data coding, and anonymization of excerpts.

#14: Data analysis

Describes the process by which inferences, themes, and other insights were identified and developed including which researchers were involved in data analysis, the specific paradigm or approach, and the rationale for this approach to analysis.

#15: Techniques to enhance trustworthiness

Outlines the techniques used to enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of data analysis (e.g., member checking, audit trail, triangulation), and the rationale for why these specific techniques were included.

IV. **Results/Findings**

The purpose of this section is to present the key themes, patterns, and findings from the data analysis without interpretation. It offers the raw evidence and participant voices that form the core discoveries of the research.

#16: Synthesis and interpretation

Outlines the main findings of the study (e.g., interpretations, inferences, and themes), and may include development of a theory or model, or integration with prior research or theory from which your study was built upon.

#17: Links to empirical data

Offers evidence to substantiate analytic findings (e.g., quotes, field notes, text excerpts, photographs).

V. **Discussion**

This section's purpose is to interpret the results, explain their meaning, and link them back to existing literature and research questions. It presents an argument for the study's contribution to existing knowledge and explores its broader implications and limitations.

#18: Integration with prior work, implications, transferability, and contributions to the field

Offers a short summary of main findings and explains how findings and conclusions connect to, support, elaborate on, or challenge conclusions found in earlier scholarship. Discusses the scope of application/generalizability and identifies the unique contributions of the scholarship to its discipline or field.

#19: Limitations

Establishes trustworthiness and acknowledges the limitations of the study's findings. Every study will have its limitations, whether it be analytical constraints (e.g. assumptions or omitted variables) or sample issues (e.g. diversity or recruitment methods). The limitations should be relevant and highly specific to the study.

VI. **Other**

In the interest of transparency and to uphold the study's integrity, it is recommended that authors include an 'Other' section to declare any financial support, known biases, or conflicts of interest. Appendices may also be included here to provide supplementary information (e.g., the exact questionnaires given to participants). So to avoid disrupting the flow of the work and to give readers a fuller understanding of the study, these materials should appear at the end of the manuscript.

#20: Conflicts of interest

Outlines potential sources of influence or perceived influence on study conduct and conclusions, and how they were managed.

#21: Funding

Outlines funding sources and other support, and the role of funders in data collection, interpretation, and reporting.

Works Cited

O'Brien, Bridget C. PhD; Harris, Ilene B. PhD; Beckman, Thomas J. MD; Reed, Darcy A. MD, MPH; Cook, David A. MD, MHPE. Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research: A Synthesis of Recommendations. *Academic Medicine* 89(9): p 1245-1251, September 2014. | DOI: 10.1097/ACM.0000000000000388.