

Writing qualitative article: It is time to quality improvement

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Abstract

Précis: This debate article highlights some questions from critics of qualitative research. Planning for proper design, philosophical background, researcher as a research instrument in the study, trustworthiness and application of findings are main debates in this field. One of the issues that have been received little attention is report of qualitative inquiry. A qualified report can answer the critics. This requires that the qualitative articles cover all points about the selected method and rigourness of study conduct to convince policy makers, managers and all readers in different level.

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Introduction

In the recent years, qualitative studies have become more popular and are considered by researchers in the health care field. (1,2). According to Saint Louis University report, about 140 journals accept and publish qualitative articles in a wide variety of fields such as health care, social sciences, education and nursing (3). All health care providers, in order to present best practice, endeavor to achieve the real experience of the clients and enter into the client's world and comprehend the process of health and disease in human (4,5). Toward translating qualitative research findings to practice in health care settings, quality of releasing findings in published qualitative articles is one of the main concerns of knowledge production in the qualitative research field.

Qualitative methodology includes various approaches such as content analysis, grounded theory, thematic analysis, mix method, phenomenology, ethnography and the other eminent qualitative methods that regardless of existing similarities have sig-

nificant different aspects in all process of data gathering to the end of the analysis and appear themes and concepts.

Hence, regardless of similarities between qualitative methods, specific guidelines for reporting each method is essential. At the present, there are some general guidelines that criticize the qualitative articles but do not include the exact details about result reporting. Also, it could be impossible to consider a unique assessment guideline or critical tools to evaluate the worth of different qualitative reports. Various guidelines and tools such as "checklist for reporting interview and focused group" (6), "Guidelines for critical review form" (7) "Critical Appraisal Skills Program", Qualitative research checklist (8) and the other recognized check list could provide criteria for reviewers and scholars. Most of these guidelines consider all qualitative methods as one method in spite of diversity in these procedures. It is accepted that there are standard processes to perform any qualitative study. In this debate, we will discuss

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about how qualitative researchers promote the quality of their articles and provide applicable and trustworthy outcome. This could be the basis for the formulation of specific guidelines.

Report Conceptual Phase

In conceptual phase, the author should present the issue and subject, define the main terms and concepts and use reasoning to justify the importance of the question in a logical and comprehensive manner.

At the outset, the researcher should explain his or her attitudes, world views and any background that can illustrate the requirement of performing this study. In a high-quality article, researcher declares about the probable bias and presumption of topics. Moreover, an introduction should fully illustrate the research question. A clear declaration of research question and purpose assists readers to decide whether or not the issue is significant. Authors should try to describe the research question according to qualitative methodology and justify how selected qualitative methods such as content analysis, grounded theory, phenomenology and other methods could answer the study question.

“What is the problem and knowledge gap?” is another question that must be answered in the introduction. It is indispensable that author of qualitative study provides evidence about the background of the study. This section includes relevant qualitative and quantitative literature review covering the topic, but the author should pay attention that literature review in qualitative study doesn't only offer a list of previous research and projects, but also it includes the interpretations and synthesis of relevant research to approve the clinical importance of a selected topic.

Operational Phase of a Report

The operational phase refers to the method that consists of context of study, the method chosen, roles of researchers, the selection of participants, data collection and data analysis.

A method should present enough details about the appropriateness of the selected method to answer the research question. There is no clear border between qualitative methods and similarities and differences in the methods. The researcher must provide details, in accordance with the selected method, showing that how the author decided to adopt this method as an appropriate method to this investigation.

Another aspect that gets less attention is the researcher's role in setting and with participants. This will convince the readers that the researcher has a proper perception of the setting and is involved in the study in order to understand the phenomenon deeply and trustfully. For example, in the ethnographic method, level of participation and the length of time spent on the setting is of high importance.

Also, one of the key points in method is a detailed discussion about selected participant. Are they experienced enough? What is the unique characteristic of them? How the first key informant is selected? And, how purposeful and theoretical sampling was continued. To continue, researchers must provide points about data collection to convince the reader that the process of data collection was acceptable and reasonable, particularly according to the selected method.

Ethical consideration is another important element, how informed consent is obtained, who could have access to the original data and what is the plan of researchers to keep anonymity and confidentiality of the participants (9).

The researcher must also provide more details about data collection methods such as Interview, focus group, observation, and document view. This data collection method is appropriate to the selected method. For example, interview process in grounded theory has different characteristics from discourse analysis.

It is expected that in the method an explanation be given about how researchers collected deep and reach data, how they draw initial code, category and themes,

which analytical tools were exploited in each stage and how theoretical model or concept came out of raw data. The researcher must describe the process of analysis in sufficient details to allow the readers be acquainted with the association of raw data and the interpretations. Understanding the relations of data to the context has a key role to translate research findings to the practice in qualitative studies.

It is obviously accepted that qualitative investigation is an interpretative methodology. Therefore, result should explain the experiences of participation in a way that make sense to all readers and stakeholders of research in all concepts, themes, categories and models. The result provides more details about how the findings have consistency with the previous literature and theory, and also what is the limitation of study and how is the transferability of result. The researcher should explain the points to assist the reader understand the study results and support arise of a new concept.

All activities, from designing the investigation, selecting informants, collecting and analyzing the data and finally publication of the result must be rigorous. Rigour is the heart of each qualitative inquiry and main element in appraising the trustworthiness of article.

For instance, the corresponding author expresses his/her experiences in qualitative inquiry to prove the researcher credibility. How is the process of prolonged engagement in a field during data gathering, how persistence observation has been done, how negative cases have been used to credible the outcomes? It is not acceptable if the author just lists the names such as member checking, debriefing, audit trail, triangulation and so on. Readers trust the findings when they are aware of more details about how to implement the methods.

Conclusion

Brief review of available qualitative articles shows that general guidelines cannot

cover the full details of specific method. For example the guideline for reporting results of phenomenology study is not fit to report historical or ethnography method. Providing and consequently using these guidelines could make an improvement in quality and application of the qualitative article.

As mentioned above, writing a qualified article and good peer review can improve the level of evidence. Regardless of unavoidable obstacles and restrictions on the paradigm qualified, qualitative article makes the findings more generalize. Outcomes of qualitative research provides evidence for policy makers and managers to practice it.

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