Qualitative Research Abstracts

Authors

- Joan Ostaszkiewicz, PhD, RN, MNurs
- Donna Z. Bliss, PhD, RN, FGSA, FAAN
- Kathleen F. Hunter PhD, RN, NP, GNC(C), NCA

The International Continence Society (ICS) Scientific Committee currently provides the following abstract submission guidelines:

- RCT Consort Abstract Guidelines
- ICS Terminology Report 2002
- IUGA/ICS Terminology Report 2009
- ICS Video Abstract Submission Rules
- ICS Video Form
- ICS Abstract Submission Rules
- ICS Abstract Form http://www.ics.org/Documents/Documents.aspx?FolderID=211

At its 2015 annual general meeting, the ICS Nursing Committee discussed the concept of drafting an informational document about submitting qualitative research abstracts to the ICS Scientific Committee. Therefore, the purpose of this document is to provide guidance to promote understanding and submission of high quality qualitative research abstracts to the ICS Annual Scientific Meeting. The document does not replace the ICS Abstract Submission Rules, but aides in the interpretation and application of the rules for qualitative research.

Qualitative research: What it is and what it isn't

Qualitative research methods are an exploratory method of enquiry that typically involves investigating unknown subject matter, sensitive topics, or difficult to access populations. Unlike in quantitative research, researchers do not start out with a hypothesis to test. The aim is to provide in-depth understanding, insight, or new ways of understanding an old problem. Qualitative researchers seek to develop a critical appreciation of social phenomena, meanings, understandings, interpretations, beliefs, behaviour, or social context. Qualitative research typically answers questions about the 'why' of human behaviour.

Qualitative research is not descriptive research using a quantitative method, and the inclusion of a section for comments on a quantitative survey does not constitute qualitative research. The results of qualitative research are an end unto themselves. The purpose of qualitative research is not to evolve into a quantitative methods study although findings often stimulate other types of studies.

Quantitative and qualitative research methods and approaches provide a more holistic understanding than can be achieved with one method/approach alone. As stated by Einstein, 'not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts' (Albert Einstein). Both qualitative and quantitative research can answer important questions to advance scientific understanding and knowledge.

Characteristics of good qualitative research

Good qualitative research is underpinned by specific philosophical assumptions about the nature of knowledge and how it can be determined. The term 'qualitative research' is an umbrella term that covers numerous approaches. Some of the more commonly known ones include: Grounded theory, Ethnography, Phenomenology, Case study, etc. Others are narrative (life history, oral history, biography, etc.). As in quantitative research, the choice of approach in qualitative research is determined by the type of question. Table 1 provides examples of the types of research question that could be addressed using these different approaches.

Sample sizes in qualitative research are typically small (10-20 subjects), and the participants or sites are usually purposively sampled. For example, participants are selected on the basis of their knowledge or experience of the research phenomenon. Data are commonly sought through open-ended, semi-structured, in-depth interviews and/or through observations. Interview participants share their perspectives and experiences in their own words and other actions. Raw data and some results are usually in the form of text or they can be in a visual form such as from photography, or film.

Table 1.

Selected Qualitative approaches	**Core characteristics**	**Type of research question**
Grounded theory	A theory-generating methodology wherein data are analysed, named and used to generate theory (Glaser 1992; Strauss & Corbin 1998).	What theory or explanation emerges from an analysis of data collected about providing continence care in long-term aged care facilities?
Ethnography	The researcher is usually a participant-observer	What are the cultural characteristics of women with incontinence from Brazil?
Phenomenology	Seeks to describe lived experiences	What is the lived experience of having a long-term indwelling catheter?
Case study research	Facilitates in-depth exploration of a phenomenon within its context and using different data sources	What are the characteristics that facilitate adjustment to incontinence in a single case or in comparative cases?

Qualitative research is an interactive process between the researcher and participants. Therefore, unlike in quantitative research, the researcher does not aim to control for confounding variables or seek to totally remove themselves from the study. Context is important to understand the data, so researchers often participate in the study and setting. Lastly, qualitative researchers interpret the data and experience as a unified whole and not as separate variables.

Reliability and credibility of qualitative research

There are differences in ideas and philosophy between quantitative and qualitative research about the ability and best way to avoid/reduce bias and portray truth. Within a positivist tradition, "a claim is considered objective and true to the extent that it is free from any biasing influence of context and background beliefs and accurately mirrors the way the world really is" (Schwandt, Lincoln & Guba 2007, p. 12). However, as some qualitative researchers assert, no interpretation is free of context and the very act of generating evidence, or identifying something as evidence is, itself, an

interpretation. Therefore, qualitative researchers who align with interpretivism assert that generalisation is not a goal because the aim is not to reproduce a set of verifiable accurate descriptions of participants' experiences, but rather, to produce an abstract and coherent representation that describes or explains the underlying situation and addresses the research objectives. The general criteria for evaluating the quality of qualitative research are similar to those for quantitative research (see below), however given the major paradigmatic difference of qualitative research and the range of qualitative approaches, writers of qualitative abstracts need specific knowledge of each approach in order to interpret and apply these criteria. For example, one must know what is considered an appropriate method and design to address a research question suitable for a particular type of qualitative research and whether the analysis is sufficiently rigorous.

Generic criteria for evaluating the quality of qualitative research

The following generic qualitative criteria have been included here for qualitative researchers to appraise the quality of their research.

1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?
2. Was a qualitative methodology appropriate?
3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?
4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?
5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?
6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?
7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?
8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?
9. Is there a clear statement of findings?
10. How valuable is the research?

(Critical Appraisal Skills Programme)

Writing an abstract for ICS about qualitative research

All abstracts submitted to the ICS, regardless of whether they use quantitative methods or qualitative methods, must use the subtitles given on the ICS blank abstract form:

- Hypothesis / aims of study
    - Qualitative research does not start with a hypothesis to test. Writers of qualitative abstracts should briefly state the nature and significance of the problem, followed by the aim of the study.

- Study design, materials and methods
    - The type of qualitative method should be described under 'design'.
    - Other elements in this section would include addressing the following questions:
        - What was the sample? What were the sample's basic characteristics (number, age, gender etc)?
        - How was the sample selected and why?
        - What were the inclusion/exclusion criteria?
        - What were the data collection procedures?

        - What data were sought and how?
        - How were the data analysed?
- Results
    - In qualitative research, the results are usually termed 'Findings'. They are often presented as themes, or as narrative description.
    - In qualitative research, the findings can be presented as themes, or as narrative description.

- Interpretation of results
    - What is the meaning of the findings? What new knowledge do the quotes/narratives/themes illustrate
    - What can be learned from the findings?

- Concluding message
    - What can be concluded from the study?
    - What is the significance/need for their study and findings? What gap (in science, practice or knowledge) does the research and findings address?
    - What message do you want readers to take away from the research/findings?
    - What are the implications for practice or further research?
    - How do the findings relate to other research—what is novel/new? How do the findings build on or add to what is known?

Resources

- Checklists for appraising research - Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) http://www.casp-uk.net/#!casp-tools-checklists/c18f8.
- Denzin NK, Lincoln YS. (2011). The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research. SAGE.
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