

Introduction

The nature of qualitative research lends itself to the use of the Internet for a variety of reasons. The Internet can be used for recruitment and provide immediate feedback from participants, either through BDC BT11 1 Tf9 0 0 9 or through BDC BTBDC BTBDC BTBDC BTBDC Bo9h57

while female language tends to be more accommodating, and when phonetic spelling is used, one assumes that the writer is younger [4].

seen as a type of communication [10]. Detecting whether someone is telling the truth can be difficult whether interviewing someone in person or online. However, in follow-up studies of online research it has been found that, in general, respondents are true to themselves in internet responses as evidenced by the following statement. "Indeed checks made in qualitative market research, where the truthfulness of participants is carefully monitored, also suggests that deliberate deception online is unusual" [1].

There may be a problem of selection bias due to the "volunteer" effect, or the non-representative nature of respondents, when researchers use the internet to recruit participants in qualitative research which may affect the integrity of the research. It could be that the individuals who respond to a request made online tend to respond only if they have been deeply affected by the issue. Although some very rich and interesting data may be collected this way, it may not be representative of the experience for the general population. This may be corrected by interviewing until the data reaches a saturation point and similar stories are being heard over and over again.

Qualitative Interviews

Interviews for qualitative research are generally described as unstructured or semi-structured [3], and may begin as very open, and then revert to a semi-structured style as the specific area of interest is identified. Conducting interviews online using a set of open ended questions with contact over time is a qualitative approach that may be used instead of a series of face to face interviews for in-depth interviewing. This approach to qualitative research may offer more anonymity, perception of control, and ease of use for participants [5].

Online Qualitative Studies in Nursing

Nurses conducting qualitative studies have begun to utilize the Internet to both recruit subjects and gather data. This method has been used successfully by several nurse researchers, and is increasingly recognized as having many benefits in populations where the Internet is a daily part of their lives.

Beck [11] has conducted multiple qualitative studies utilizing the Internet to examine various groups and their experience with birth trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder related to childbirth, as well as women with depression [6]. Although the advantages of being able to observe the participant in face to face interviews have been generally accepted, new methods of contacting subjects online has certain benefits as well. The benefits of participating in online research for women with depression include offering a place to tell their stories and the benefit to the researcher is being able to sample populations that may not ordinarily volunteer for a face to face interview as it allows for more privacy so that participants may fully express their feelings [6].

Beck's [11] study of birth trauma using online discussion with women around the world was an empowering experience for the participants and an example of the possible benefits of Internet dialogue for participants. The participants felt they could finally make sense of the birth trauma process by letting go of the details once they relayed the story of the birth trauma. These themes were similar to the feelings expressed by another group of women in a face-to-face qualitative study including providing a voice, empowerment, healing, and sense of purpose and acknowledgement of their experiences [6].

Eo and colleagues published several Internet-based qualitative studies in 2008 [12,13]. One was on the gender and ethnic differences in cancer patients needing help, in which a month-long online

forum found a theme of marginalization for ethnic minority patients with cancer [12]. Another accessed Internet communities for the recruitment of subjects for an online forum to explore attitudes toward physical activity amongst midlife women [13].

The use of the Internet in qualitative research allows the researcher to create a more level playing field where the participant feels that his or her expertise is valued [3]. There is a positive side as well to eliminating visual cues of appearance; ethnicity and gender in that communication may be less inhibited. There are benefits to the participants including emotional support and acknowledging their expertise in the area being studied. Asynchronous communication, in which the responses to Internet prompts are entered at the participants schedule allows, gives the researcher time to read and reflect on the information they are obtaining and consider how to phrase follow-up prompts.

There are however, ethical and legal concerns with utilizing the Internet for research. If a nurse is seen as giving medical advice to a person out of state that may be construed as practicing across state lines without a license. It is important for the nurse to stay in the researcher role rather than a clinical role while conducting online research. Collecting qualitative data through Coom (a.oEMC) Coom(360)utilizing50 0 9 3

