



A reporting guide for qualitative studies

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Qualitative studies provide insight into complex phenomena. Unlike measurement-based studies which typically quantify what happens under experimental conditions, qualitative studies often help explain behaviours or perceptions under actual circumstances. Qualitative studies in the field of communicable diseases can be used to provide insights into why people choose high-risk behaviours and to identify factors that influence their decisions. For example, a qualitative study may address why healthcare practitioners do not practice adequate hand hygiene and whether patients might help by reminding them to do so. The results can be surprising. For example, a recent study identified that inpatients in one hospital who were most dissatisfied with the care they received were also the least likely to ask healthcare professionals if they had washed their hands (1). Furthermore, the study identified that the decision not to pose this question was linked to patient awareness that staff satisfaction was low.

Qualitative research analyzes data from direct field observations, in-depth, open-ended interviews and written documents. Inductive analyses yield patterns and themes that generate hypotheses and offer a basis for future research. Although qualitative studies do not create generalizable evidence, well-reported studies provide enough information for readers to assess the applicability or transferability of findings to their own context (2).

There are a variety of checklists on how to report qualitative studies (3-6). The *Canada Communicable Disease Report* (CCDR) has developed a 24-item checklist that synthesizes these including the COREQ checklist noted on the EQUATOR Network (6). The CCDR checklist identifies the importance of describing how data was gathered and summarized, what trends were determined, exploring corroborative findings, offering alternative explanations and identifying possible next steps (Table 1).

Reports of qualitative studies are usually around 2,500 words in length—excluding the abstract, tables and references. As with all submissions, check CCDR’s *Information for authors*, published at the beginning of each volume in January of each year for general manuscript preparation and submission requirements (7).

Table 1: Checklist for qualitative studies

Reporting item	No.	Description
Title/Abstract		
Title	1	Compose a title that includes the term “qualitative”, the population, condition, place and time.
Abstract	2	Use a structured abstract format with the following section headings: Background, Objective, Methods, Findings and Conclusion.
Introduction		
Issue identification	3	Identify the topic of the study and why it is important.
Review of literature	4	Provide a summary of the literature relating to the topic and what gaps there may be.
Rationale for study	5	Identify the rationale for the study. The rationale for the use of qualitative methods can be noted here or in the methods section.
Objective	6	Clearly articulate the objective of the study.
Ethics approval	7	Note here or in the methods section whether ethics board review was indicated, and if it was, where review and approval was obtained.
Method		
Setting	8	Describe the setting of the study and the relationship of the researcher to study participants (if any).
Approach	9	Identify the qualitative methods (e.g., interviews, participant observation) used in the study, any theoretical underpinnings if appropriate (e.g., grounded theory) and the rationale for their use.
Populations	10	Describe the groups from which people were invited to participate in the study.
Sampling	11	Identify the sampling strategies for the study (e.g., theoretical sampling, snowball technique).
Data collection	12	Describe how data collection tools were developed (e.g., pilot testing of interview guides) and how the data were recorded (e.g., audio, audiovisual or field notes).



Analysis	13	Identify how the data were managed and analyzed, including any software system used, and how information was assessed for credibility and transferability (e.g., member checking, inter-observer reliability and triangulation).
Synthesis	14	Describe how the findings were synthesized (e.g., what were the principles and choices informing the recognition of patterns and formation of categories? How were major and minor themes developed?).
Findings		
Sample	15	Identify the total sample size and non-participation rate.
Population, time and place	16	Present the findings in context, i.e., with enough background and contextual detail to give a sense of the population, time and place (e.g., through appropriate use of quotes).
Analysis	17	Present an analysis that is credible and compelling (i.e., themes flow logically from the findings; relations between data and theoretical models and perspectives are described; interpretations are insightful).
Comparisons	18	Explore corroborative findings (e.g., triangulation) and consider contradictory or diverse opinions (e.g., negative cases).
Synthesis	19	Present findings in such a way that they clearly address the research objective.
Discussion		
Summary of key findings	20	Summarize key findings and indicate how the findings are relevant to the objective of the study.
Strengths and weaknesses	21	Identify the strengths and weaknesses of the study and consider alternative explanations for the findings when appropriate.
Transferability	22	Explore the implications of the study considering the applicability or transferability of the findings.
Next steps	23	Propose next steps or further areas of inquiry.
Conclusion	24	Ensure the conclusion integrates the data and analysis and addresses the objective of the study.

Abbreviation: No., Number

References

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