

Reflections on working with an interpreter when conducting qualitative in-depth interviews

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Background/Context

This paper will provide a reflective review of the experience of conducting qualitative in-depth interviews through an interpreter, with Bangladeshi people who are living with Ankylosing Spondylitis. The complexities of using interpreters in research (Edwards 1998) have often led to the exclusion of people whose preferred language is not English. However, there is little guidance available on working with interpreters when conducting research interviews (Squires 2008). I had no previous experience of this process and being from an ethnic minority background (though a different one from the participants), I was aware there are not always equivalent words between languages. I was also concerned about feeling a lack of control in the interview. According to Kvale (1996: 147) the 'interviewer is him or herself the research instrument', therefore the interpreter's role needs consideration too.

Preparation and process

The same Bengali interpreter assisted throughout and she had previous experience of conducting research interviews as a health advocate in a community social work team. The preparation included selection of the interpreter, building a relationship with the interpreter, clarifying the interpreter's role, agreeing the style of interpretation (active or passive), training and preparation for the interpreter, practicalities (e.g. seating arrangements during the interview) and agreeing the process for reflection. All study documents including the interview topic guide were translated to Bengali and the interpreter found them clear and easy to use. Reflective review following each interview allowed the interpreter to raise any difficulties in translation, identify any other problems and consider solutions.

Conclusion:

Despite the complexities of interviewing with an interpreter, I collected rich and meaningful data and therefore interpreters can be seen as active partners with the researcher working together with the interpreter as the research instrument.

References:

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