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Accessing, recruiting, and retaining vulnerable populations: Challenges encounter from a longitudinal qualitative study in Cape Town, South Africa

Evalina Van Wijk

Western Cape College of Nursing, South Africa

Statement of the Problem: Various authors have alluded to the fact that the successful access, recruitment and retention of participants are some of the most challenging phases of any longitudinal research project. Yet, many publications describing longitudinal qualitative studies of sexual assault fail to provide a detailed report on the processes followed, the difficulties experienced, as well as the reasons for such difficulties. To fill these gaps, the researcher describes the strategies applied to access, recruit and retain the participants for the entire six-month period post rape. The challenges encounter during recruitment and data collection are also described.

Methodology & Theoretical Orientation: A longitudinal inquiry, using the hermeneutic-phenomenological approach of Paul Ricoeur was used to investigate the lived experience of male intimate partners of female rape victims in Cape Town. The research question that guided the study was: what are the lived experiences of intimate partners of female rape victims during the six months following the rape? To gain access to the intimate partner through the rape victim, the attending medical or nursing staff at the forensic units identified female rape victims who were in an intimate relationship with a partner of any gender, as disclosed by the victim. This was done either directly after the rape or at their 72-hour follow-up visit. The selection of study participants involved purposeful sampling. After providing their informed consent, nine intimate partners of female rape victims living in Cape Town, South Africa, participated in four separate face-to-face, semi-structured interviews as follows: (a) within 14 days of, (b) a month after, (c) three months after and (d) six months after the rape.

Findings: The challenges and strategies that were pertinent in maintaining participation of recruits were: Location of participants for follow-up interviews, sensitivity to the participant's emotional life, strategies to keep participants motivated, ensuring participants' safety, providing monetary incentives, planning for termination of researcher-participant relationship and ethical considerations.

Conclusion & Significance: Male intimate partners of female rape survivors are active help seekers; however it is not always easy to locate them for follow-up interviews and to keep them motivated during the six months following the rape of their female partners.

Recommendations: The need to continue to identify creative and effective ways to access, recruit and retain intimate partners of female rape survivors during longitudinal qualitative research is warranted.

Biography

Evalina Van Wijk is a Psychiatric Nursing Lecturer in Department of Psychiatric Nursing, Western Cape College of Nursing Cape Town, South Africa and she is responsible for the advanced Psychiatric Nursing module. She obtained her Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in the year 2011 at the University of Cape Town, South Africa.

evalinavanwijk100@gmail.com

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