

Appendix 5.

General description of methods used in qualitative research

In recent years, qualitative research methods have developed and expanded to become an important alternative research approach. All qualitative research has a common foundation, but there are several different research approaches. The following are examples of some of the most common approaches.

Grounded theory

Grounded theory is used primarily to develop theories on people's behaviour by analysing qualitative data. The method encompasses both induction, in which hypotheses are formulated from specific data, and deduction, in which specific conclusions are drawn from hypotheses. It is important to minimise influences from existing theories and the researcher's pre-conceived ideas. The researcher must be open-minded with respect to what might emerge, both during collection and analysis of the data.

Within grounded theory, various methods of data collection can be applied, for example interviews, observations and documents (diaries, letters, etc). The method does not have to be determined from the beginning but can develop progressively. The aim is to collect plentiful data material, which should be

subjected to systematic analysis. With respect to selection of participants, theoretical selection is used, which means that selection is steered by the previous analysis (ideas and concepts which emerge as relevant for the developing theory determine continued selection).

Data collection, analysis and generation of theory occur in parallel. When for example, an interview has been conducted, it is analysed immediately. In this way new ideas emerge which the researcher can apply in the next interview. The researcher constantly goes through his or her material in order to check that nothing has been overlooked.

Open coding means that the researcher goes through the material and gives every event or phenomenon a code which clarifies its content. Codes which have a common factor are grouped in categories. The coding procedures mean that the categories are related, either axially or horizontally, depending on the means of coding. Every category is specified in terms of the conditions which resulted in their formation. In selective coding, analysis leads to a main category, into which all the other categories can be integrated. Only after a main category has been established can a search be conducted of literature related to the central theme, or to several related themes. The main category is then analysed.

The constant comparative method is central to grounded theory and comprises asking questions and making comparisons. New and old codes are compared in order to distinguish similarities and differences.

During analysis, the researcher makes notes about questions, thoughts and preliminary interpretations of the association and the relationship between categories, so-called memos. The notes can contain for example, diagrams, mathematical formulae, tables and flow charts.

The researcher may not select data from the material in order to get it to fit a previously selected theory or concept. The theory which is developed is either substantive or formulaic. The substantive theory is developed for a specific, empirical area, for example a group of diseases. In contrast, formulaic theory is more general and can for example, include concepts which are not only associated with a specific diagnosis or a disease experience. Within grounded theory, theory development is regarded as a process without finality. A single study can therefore be a stage in the development of a more extensive theory [14,29].

Example 1A
Study using grounded theory as the research method [11].

The aim was to investigate how people with late complications of polio modify their daily activities. In order to form a heterogeneous group, the participants were selected to ensure variation in experience, gender, current age and age at onset of disease.

The informants were interviewed according to an interview guide with a list of topics to be covered in the interview. No prepared questions were used and the order of questions was modified to suit each interview. During the interviews the researcher made field notes. The interviews were complemented with a questionnaire to describe the informants. Using several data collection methods allows triangulation of data, i.e. combining data collected by several methods to ensure agreement. This leads to improved credibility and a deeper understanding of the results.

The transcribed interviews were read through to gain a grasp of the content as a whole. Then each row was read in the context of "what is happening/what does this mean?" The phenomena which emerged were coded (given a name). The next step was to group the coded material into categories and subcategories.

Because coping strategies were the central issue under investigation, the researcher focused on the categories which described this. For every strategy, questions such as when, where, how and why were formulated. With the aid of the responses to the questions, the subcategories emerged.

According to grounded theory, the material should be described in as few categories as possible. The researcher therefore undertook a further in-depth analysis of the main features of each category. This resulted in the strategies being summarised into six groups. Analysis and summary of the strategies resulted in a central phenomenon, the main category "maintaining a balance in daily activities now and in the future". The researcher continued to process the material in the same way and thus brought forth a further main category, with underlying categories and subcategories.

Example 1B
Study within social
care with grounded
theory as the research
method [11].

This qualitative study used data from a pilot study of a Social Enterprise Intervention (SEI); an extensive vocational training program with integrated clinical services for homeless youth. In-depth interviews were carried out with 28 homeless adolescents and young adults participating in the SEI study to explore their views on family environment characteristics and abuse experiences.

The informants, that were between 18 and 24 years of age (20 males, 8 females), were chosen by convenience sampling. During a period of one month, SEI staff spent 10 hours a week at the host agency in order to recruit participants into the SEI-program. Potential study participants were approached in a random order by the staff members in the central dayroom, and were asked whether they wanted to participate in the program. To select the youth two screening criteria were used. Firstly, during the month prior to the study, they had to have attended the agency at least twice a week. Secondly, they had to commit verbally to attend the program to receive vocational training for four months as well as business training for three months.

In order to analyse the transcripts from the in-depth interviews with the youth, a constant comparative method was used. In relation to family characteristics the following themes emerged: 'home instability', 'abandonment', and 'caregiver substance abuse'. Abuse-related subthemes that emerged included intrafamilial abuse, caregiver abuse, rejection, and deprecation by caregivers.

Grounded theory was the method of choice to interpret findings and to develop working hypotheses that could guide future studies of multi-type maltreatment among homeless youth.

Phenomenology

The focus in phenomenology lies in the individual's consciousness and lived experience. Two expressions are central: the life world (the world we are familiar with through our lived experience, which offers a means of understanding the world, without theoretical explanation) and intentionality/directionality (consciousness is always directed towards something; a perception is always a perception of something).

The researcher wants to get the informants to get in touch with their own experiences and formulate them in words. The researcher can use photography or film, request the informants to keep a diary, or describe events and situations which have affected them. Moreover, letters, drawings and paintings can be analysed.

It is important that the researcher can comprehend, envisage and imagine being in the informant's life world. It is also important to allow time for the informant to contact and reflect over his/her experiences. In order to capture the participants' continuing reflections, repeated interviews, seminars or focus groups may be used.

Pre-understanding is the researcher's subjective research perspective. It is a requirement for reaching a viewpoint and developing new knowledge and understanding. However, it can also be an obstacle to seeing the new. It is therefore important for a researcher to reflect on his/her own subjectivity.

New knowledge is developed through alternately analysing the entire research material and the meaning and relationships of the individual parts. It is not possible to reduce understanding of the whole to the sum of its parts. Nor can the researcher claim to reach a definitive or "true" interpretation: but it must be stated that the interpretation which is presented is the most likely one [11].

The overall aim of the study was to develop an understanding of how physiotherapists can help people with non-specific pain and stress problems, to regain their corporeal identity.

A strategic selection was made of physiotherapists with long experience of the field in question. The researchers wanted a range of experience in order to have access to different aspects of how the physiotherapy treatment could be understood.

Each physiotherapist was filmed while treating a patient. The films were analysed and transcribed (written down, word for word). The material was used as a basis for the in-depth interviews which were conducted with each physiotherapist. By viewing every film over and over again new issues were successively disclosed.

During the in-depth interviews the film was first viewed as a whole and then in sequences while the physiotherapist was interviewed. Every interview was transcribed and a preliminary analysis was made before the next physiotherapist was interviewed. By this means new themes were developed which were deepened in dialogue with the physiotherapists during the course of the research process.

The transcribed interview material was analysed and processed in several stages. Initially the material was read through in order to gain an overall sense of the whole. Then the meaning units were delineated (meaning units are meanings which contain important information). Depending on content, they were coded into themes. The material was then read for a third time to specify the subthemes. Finally a flow chart was constructed to visualise the themes and subthemes. The data material was compiled into detailed descriptions of relevant data. In the next step, the researchers interpreted and highlighted the main ideas and meaning structures in the physiotherapists' understanding.

The next step was an analysis of the basic meanings in the physiotherapists' understanding. The units of meaning and the underlying assumptions were organised into a larger whole, with central themes and subthemes. The meaning of the material was then separated into three larger, more theoretical components.

The final stage in the analysis comprised a theoretical interpretation of the body, the being and the meaning. In order to be able to evaluate the relevance of the interpretation and the results from the perspective of everyday clinical practice, the results were discussed in a reference group.

Example 2A
Study using phenomenology as the research method [11].

Example 2B
Study within social care
with phenomenology
as the research
method [13].

In this Irish study the objective was to explore and describe the experience of loss among nurses working in a long-term residential care setting. A so called interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach was used with the aim of examining emotions and cognitions that underlie the descriptions of the subjective experiences.

IPA is phenomenological as it aim to seek the perspective of the individual's lived experience. The approach is also interpretative in that it acknowledges the personal beliefs and experiences of the researcher. Finally, the approach can be said to be idiographic in that it attempts to understand how a specific experimental phenomenon is understood from the perspective of the individual in a particular context.

The idiographic approach involves a detailed engagement with the transcript of each participant, and integration only occurs later in the analysis. In addition, IPA also requires the researcher to adopt a reflexive attitude. Hence, the first author noted personal reflections both before, immediately after, and one day after each interview. During data analysis these reflections revealed that some comments from the participants were difficult to shy away from.

The study sample consisted of nurses who all worked at a public long-term residential care setting in the West of Ireland. In response to a study information leaflet that was displayed in clinical areas inviting nurses to participate, seven nurses (five females, two males) volunteered to be interviewed. All of the seven nurses had worked in a long-term residential care setting for at least two years post-registration (both day and night duty). Five had worked with older people for over 15 years, whereas three of the nurses had a postgraduate qualification in gerontological nursing.

Semi-structured interviews, which were guided by an interview schedule, were used. Researches that uses the IPA approach often use such an interview schedule that facilitates the discussion of to the study relevant topics.

The authors found three main themes: 'life's final journey', 'family', and 'professional carer'. In conclusion the authors give their view on the implications of the results for clinical practice.

Phenomenography

Phenomenography is a method which was developed for pedagogical research. The method is intended to highlight individuals' various impressions of a phenomenon. The main aim is to differentiate various aspects of the phenomenon. It is important to differentiate between "the way something is" and "how something is perceived". The most common method of data collection is by interview [11].

Example 3A
Study using phenomenography as a research method [11].

The aim of the study was to investigate how senior nurses perceive the oral cavity in general and the oral health of their patients in particular. In selecting the informants, the researchers focused on variation in gender, age, educational standard, years of experience and geographic distribution in order to gain as great a variation of perspectives as possible.

The interview questions were constructed with the aim of getting the informants to develop their thoughts about oral health and its importance and to capture their spontaneous opinions. The questions should not be leading, but open in character, for example "What does oral health mean to you?". The researcher was careful to put the questions in the same way to all the informants. Afterwards the interviews were transcribed word for word.

The researcher read the interviews several times in order to gain a sense of the whole. Then each interview was read in detail to identify statements which described the nurses' perceptions of oral health. These statements were compared for similarities and dissimilarities and grouped according to common features. After further comparison, reading and reflection, new dimensions were disclosed.

The perceptions were compiled in descriptive categories and were related to each other inasmuch as they contained different impressions of the same content.

That the same researcher conducted all the interviews strengthens the credibility of the data. However, there was a risk of misinterpretation, because the researcher did not personally transcribe the interviews. In order to avoid misinterpretation, the researcher read through the transcriptions at the same time as she listened to the tape recordings.

Example 3B
Study within social care
with phenomenography
as the research
method [14].

The aim of this empirical study was to explore and describe the variation in how evidence based practice (EBP) is understood within the field of social work. For this, a phenomenographic approach was chosen. How people understand a phenomenon is found in a limited number of qualitatively different ways. From a phenomenographic perspective; the aim is to reflect these understandings and hence not judge a statement as being right or wrong.

Study participants from three different levels and from three Swedish municipality welfare offices were recruited. Fourteen semi-structured interviews were held with eight males and six females. The length of which the present positions were held varied from one to twelve years, where staff had served the most years and politicians the fewest. The study participants were aged between 35 and 61 years. All of the managers and staff personnel had university degrees, whereas this was not the case for any of the politicians.

To get a deeper understanding of how the respondents understood the phenomenon, a combination of abstract and decontextualised questions were used together with encouragements to describe the phenomenon by giving examples of direct experiences and by visualising the consequences, referred to as 'situated examples'.

Subsequently, a phenomenographic analysis procedure was performed in accordance with the seven steps described by Dahlgren and Fallsberg (1991); familiarization, consolidation, comparison, grouping, articulation, labelling, and contrasting. The analysis resulted in five qualitative different understandings of EBP described by the following categories: 1) fragmented, 2) discursive, 3) instrumental, 4) multifaceted and 5) critical.

The authors concluded that it is important to acknowledge the different ways in which EBP is understood in order to create a supportive atmosphere in which EBP can thrive. In order to accomplish a social work practice that is beneficial for the clients various sources of knowledge need to be utilized; both research-based and practice-based knowledge.

Phenomenological hermeneutics

Phenomenological hermeneutics focuses on interpretation of interviews as text. What are interpreted are not the actual experiences but the text which comprises the descriptions constructed in the interviews. The researcher restructures the text in order to find deeper implications. Tangential parts are merged into larger units. The focus of attention is lived experiences, not the individual.

The strategy is based on the following method stages:

- Narrative interviews – a conversation in which the informant describes freely and reflects on lived experience and the interviewer and informant together bring out the implications in the phenomenon which is to be studied

- Naïve reading – an initial superficial interpretation which captures a feeling of the whole
- Structural analyses – investigation of the text intended to explain what it says; as a text can have several dimensions, more than one structural analysis may be necessary
- Comparison and interpretation of the whole – critical reflection of the authors' pre-understanding, the naïve reading and structural analyses in order to reach a comprehensive understanding of the text.

In this study the researchers wanted to investigate the decision-making processes involved in egg donation. The aim was to investigate both the women's motivation for donating eggs and their experiences of being potential egg donors. The type of egg donation investigated in the study is so-called "egg sharing", which means that a donor who can produce eggs, but needs in vitro fertilisation, will be offered certain benefits, such as reduced waiting time or cheaper fertility treatment, if she is also prepared to donate eggs to a woman who is unable to produce eggs herself.

An opportunistic selection was made at a fertility clinic in the United Kingdom between October 1999 and June 2000. Interviews based on open questions were then conducted with eleven potential egg donors immediately after their introductory consultation at the fertility clinic, before the women had time to process their impressions. The interviews lasted about 45 minutes and were then transcribed word for word prior to analysis.

The analysis resulted in six themes on donating eggs. The motives for egg donation were multidimensional and all interrelated. The author drew the conclusion that egg donation can be seen as a symbol of hope. The author makes clear i.a. that egg donation is not to be regarded as an altruistic action, but as a link in an overwhelming desire to have children, in a system hampered by lack of resources.

Example 4A
Study using phenomenological hermeneutics as the research method [12].

Example 4b
Study within social care with hermeneutic phenomenology as the research method [16].

In this American study the author aimed to explore the experience of foster parents caring for children with special health care needs who live in rural communities and remote areas in North-eastern United States. The study purpose was to compose a vivid description of the experience, in order for nurses to get a better understanding of what kind of problems foster parents of children with special health care needs who live in rural areas are faced by. The research question for this study was: What is the lived experience of foster parenting a child with special needs in a rural community? What is the essence of the experience?

As hermeneutic phenomenology is an approach that can be used to describe lived experience and which requires that descriptive and interpretive processes are merged, van Manen's methodological approach for a phenomenological inquiry was chosen. To recruit study participants, purposive sampling using criterion, as well as snowball techniques were used. The essential criterion to participate in the study was that of parenting foster children with special health care needs for at least six months. Ten participants were recruited, ranging from 24 to 66 years of age.

An unstructured interview strategy that was guided by one broad question, "what is it like to be a foster parent to name of child?" was chosen. Probes and open-ended clarifying questions were also integrated in the interviews. A circuitous process was used for data analysis in which reflection was initiated with the first interview, and it was subsequently continued in parallel with the data collection. It also included reading of transcripts multiple times and listening to audiotapes.

The data analysis revealed that the concerns that the foster parents have are related to accessing medical care and decision making. The parents expressed feelings of being overwhelmed and unprepared, isolated, and stigmatized.

Qualitative content analysis

Content analysis usually means that by repeated reading of a text the researcher identifies meaning units, which are then coded. These are then sorted into categories by comparing and contrasting the similarities and dissimilarities of the meaning units. No material may be excluded due to there not being an appropriate category. Nor may any material fall between two categories or be placed in more than one category [11].

With the aid of content analysis, the researcher can draw conclusions based on the data and its context; where the aim is, for example, to increase knowledge, provide new insights, or disclose facts. The aim is to achieve a detailed and extensive description of a phenomenon. Content analysis is common in, for instance, nursing, psychiatry, geriatrics and public health research. Written, verbal or visual communication may be analysed.

Example 5A
Study using content analysis as the research method [11].

In a study of loneliness experienced by the very elderly, 30 people aged between 85 and 103 were interviewed. Because the experience of loneliness can vary from individual to individual, and because qualitative content analysis is appropriate for inductive thematisation of data, this strategy was considered suitable for the purpose of the study. The informants were identified through the electoral rolls; those who were invited to participate belonged to one of the following age groups: 85 years, 90 years or 95 and over. They lived in a geographically defined area. Thematic interviews were conducted and the introductory question concerned what it was like to be old. Apart from this question, questions were asked about the following themes; loneliness, the aging body, important life events, experience of solace and experience of meaning (meaningful events). The interviews were conducted in the participants' homes by four researchers, all with experience of working with the elderly.

The analysis was undertaken by two of the researchers. Initially, the entire text was read, in order to gain a sense of the whole. Then the researchers together reflected over the main content of the texts. The text was then divided into two domains, limitations and possibilities. Meaning units were then identified, condensed, abstracted and labelled with a code. The codes were then compared and categorised into ten categories. Thereafter a theme was formulated, based on the text as a whole, the content of the ten categories and the researchers' sense of what underlay the content. The development of a theme can be regarded as a process which is ongoing throughout the analytical procedures and which represents a summary result of the study.

Example 5B
Study within social
care with content
analysis as the research
method [20].

The purpose of this Hawaiian study was to explore varying influences on foster children's health and what support that is needed for the foster children in order for them to achieve optimal health. The researchers chose to use focus group interviews with semi-structured questions and content analysis as the method for data collection and data analysis.

In total, seven focus groups were formed. Out of these seven, five groups were made up of former foster children (32 adolescents in total). In addition, one group consisted of six foster parents, and a final group of ten foster care professionals was also formed.

An advisory board generated a similar set of questions for each stakeholder group. Each focus group interview started with a general question designed to address the participants' perception of how a child's mind and body were affected by the foster care experience and what positive and negative aspects of foster care that might influence the physical and mental health of foster children. The interviews were subsequently transcribed and analysed using Krippendorff's recommended procedures for content analysis.

The transcribed data was coded following an inductive and interpretive process that involved constant comparison techniques, searching for recurring themes, clustering, and development of mutually exclusive defined categories. To finish of the analysis, an interpretation of the meaning of the data, within a theoretically grounded framework was carried out.

The themes that emerged from this analysis focused primarily on the mental health of the foster children; including difficulties with perceiving oneself as being different; the need for coping strategies; problems encountered with the foster care system itself; transitioning between foster homes; and finally the need for medical homes. The stakeholder groups recognised the necessity of mutual support for one another. They also proposed potential solutions for addressing concerns.

Ethnography

The assumptions which govern ethnographic research are that every group of humans who live together for a period of time will develop a culture of its own. Ethnographic research focuses on the culture in which a person lives. The primary method applied in ethnography is observation according to the anthropological tradition. It requires intensive field work, in which the researcher gains a deep insight into the culture in question.

Modern anthropologists use ethnographic methods to study modern society and social problems, for example substance abuse. Ethnographers use methods for participant observation and field work. However, what distinguishes the method is that interpretation and application of the findings occur in a cultural perspective [13].

Example 6A
Study using ethnography
as the research
method [13].

The researcher studied patients who had been afflicted by mental illness for the first time, in order to investigate how their life situation had been affected. This was done by experiencing and identifying processes in the mental health care system in Copenhagen, Denmark. The researchers participated actively in nursing staff meetings. Through informal discussions the researcher gathered information about their backgrounds. The nursing staff themselves wrote down their thoughts and observations. The researcher kept a diary and in this way could deal with his experiences and preserve a critical attitude to his research. As the researcher did not share the patients' experiences it was difficult to study the question from their perspective: therefore the researcher conducted interviews with fifteen patients. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed.

Each patient was interviewed five times over a period of two and a half years. The final interview was conducted six months after completion of treatment. Thus the researcher could both modify questions according to the patient's treatment phase and relate topics which arose during an interview with previous events.

The researcher sent out questionnaires to patients and their relatives and also conducted focus group interviews, with questions about the treatment and the support they felt that they received from the nursing staff. The nursing staff wrote about their experiences and also participated in the focus groups. Moreover, the researcher was an observer at meetings between patients and their healthcare providers and also attended meetings of the therapy groups. All collected material was transcribed, coded and compared, over time and between patients. By this means the researcher was able to identify various structures and processes within mental health care.

Example 6b
Study within social care
with ethnography as the
research method [18].

This Swedish study explored the everyday work of Case Managers for older persons with multi-morbidity with the aim of describing the case managers' experiences of the Case Management intervention to better understand and contribute to the advancement of Case Management. To do so, an ethnographic approach was chosen, including individual interviews with nine case managers, a group interview and participant observations with field notes. Purposeful sampling was used when selecting the participants of the study. A thematic analysis was conducted of the interviews (that had been recorded and transcribed verbatim.)

As a research method, ethnography is characterized by the researcher's role as an instrument, and using observation and data collection, which takes place in the participants' normal environment, and that includes different sources, i.e. data triangulation. The ethnographic approach lets the researcher become part of the specific context of the study.

This study followed the principles of focused ethnography, which is an interpretive approach opening up for an in-depth study of experiences from both the perspective of the inside view of the study participants as well as the outside view of the researcher.

The authors identified an overarching theme in the data; "challenging current professional identity". Under this theme, they further identified three sub-themes, namely: 1) Adjusting to familiar work in an unfamiliar role, 2) Striving to improve the health system through a new role, and 3) Trust is vital to advocacy.

It was concluded by the authors that the findings of the study shows the complexity of Case Management for older persons with complex health needs, seen from the perspective of the case managers, describing how their daily work challenges their professional identity.

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is about interpretation and understanding. In an empirical study, the most important instrument for analysis is interpretation. Interpretations are not presented as the truth between cause and effect, but as new and hopefully rewarding ways of understanding emotional responses, motives, actions, thought patterns and other meaningful human activities.

The aim of hermeneutic interpretation is to gain a relevant, mutual understanding of the meaning of a text. Hermeneutics highlights the dialogue which creates the interview texts which are to be interpreted, and clarifies the process by which the interview texts are interpreted. This process can be regarded as a dialogue with the text.

The hermeneutic circle is typical for interpretation of meaning. Interpretation develops in a circular movement between the researcher's understanding and the collected material. It leads to new understanding which will become pre-understanding in future interpretative strategies. Another term for the hermeneutic circle is the hermeneutic spiral, to signify that it is not possible

to revert to a previous point. Understanding is deepened all the time. The hermeneutic process of text interpretation is in principle never ending, but in practice it ceases when a reasonable meaning is arrived at, a relevant uniform meaning without inner contradictions.

By interviewing patients and their relatives the researcher investigated what it was like to seek care at a hospital emergency department. When all interviews had been completed, the researcher transcribed the material and compared it with his/her own pre-understanding. The reading gave an initial sense of the meaning of the material.

The material was then sorted into themes and subthemes, which the researcher compared with the initial, preliminary picture. Each subtheme was withdrawn from its theme to be compared with the other subthemes. Tangential subthemes formed a basis for partial interpretation. In order to validate the partial interpretations, the researcher checked them against the data. The researcher tested various interpretations and constantly referred back to the data in order to determine which interpretation seemed most plausible in relation to the aim of the study.

In this manner, eight partial interpretations were developed. An example of a theme is: "high medical prioritising increases satisfaction with the care provided" and "socially weak groups find it hard to be heard". The partial interpretations were compared with each other and associated interpretations were grouped together as larger units. This led to three main strands: "to uphold dignity by directly or indirectly challenging the attitudes of the healthcare providers", "to maintain one's dignity by directing one's disappointment elsewhere" and "to maintain one's dignity by being a 'good patient'".

Finally the researcher formulated a main interpretation which highlighted the underlying pattern of the entire material. The main interpretation was validated in that it explained all the partial interpretations.

Example 7A
Study using
hermeneutics as the
research method [11].

Example 7B
Study within social care
with hermeneutics as the
research method [19].

A study on the influence of relationships on personhood in dementia care was conducted in Norway in 2013 and aimed at increasing the understanding of the nature and quality of relationships between persons with dementia, family carers, and professional care givers as well as how these relationships influenced personhood in people with dementia. Personhood can be understood as increasingly concealed rather than lost in dementia.

The hermeneutical design in this study was based on ten cases, where each case was made up of a triad: the person with dementia, the family carer and the professional caregiver. To participate in the study, persons with dementia had to be: 67 years or older, diagnosed with dementia, have a Clinical Dementia Rating score of 2 (ie. Moderate dementia) and finally, be able to communicate verbally.

In the interviews with family carers and professional caregivers, a semi-structured interview guide was used. Participant observation of interactions between professional caregivers and persons with dementia were conducted during morning care or activities at a day care centre and field notes were taken. Data analysis was conducted in two steps, first an inductive analysis with an interpretive approach and secondly a deductive analysis that applied a theoretical framework for person-centred care.

The study revealed that there were three relationships that diminished personhood: unprofessional relationships between caregivers and persons with dementia, task-centred relationships and reluctant helping relationships between family carers and persons with dementia. Contrary, the relationships that sustained personhood were professional relationships between caregivers and persons with dementia and close emotional bonds between family carers and persons with dementia.

Action research

The aim of action research is to solve specific problems within for example, an organisation or a community. In general, action research is associated with actions which lead to change and development. The most obvious feature of action research is the participant-based and interactive approach. This means that all participants, both researchers and staff of the organisation in question, work together. They contribute to the planning and conduct of the study. Thus the difference between research and action can be indistinct. The research methods tend to be less systematic, more informal and specific to the question, the people or the organisation under investigation.

Action research can be applied in various situations, with many different participants and in different environments. Today it is used increasingly in health-care and nursing to stimulate and develop various activities. Within research in health and medical care, action research is described in two different ways: as a means of conducting a study and as a study of the actual research process. These two can complement each other.

Classical action research is conducted cyclically in four stages: 1) planning based on thoughts and experiences, 2) the planned intervention is carried out,

3) the intervention is monitored by field observations and data collection and
4) the results are subjected to reflection, planning and evaluation and monitoring, which leads to new questions, which in turn lead to new interventions. It may be a thought or idea which originates within a personnel group. The thought is brought to the attention of a researcher who can participate in the process of change and investigate its effects on those who participate in the study. Regardless of the structure used, the people with a common desire to solve a problem or improve a situation are always at the centre of the process.

The advantage of action research is primarily the potential to conduct research in a practical environment, where both the researcher and the participants are active during the research process. Another advantage of action research is that it critically and openly scrutinises established practical routines, with the aim of improvement, development and new understanding. This co-operative approach enhances both practice and knowledge.

The aim was to produce and introduce a suitable model for guidance of care providers within corrective services. Initially there was marked opposition on the part of the care providers who felt they were being under surveillance, and were uncertain as to what the researchers intended to do with the information they collected. The researchers were therefore careful to clarify the aim of the project and their own roles within the group.

Five institutions participated in the project and appropriate co-workers were suggested as supervisors. Background information about the proposed supervisors was collected by means of a questionnaire. The potential supervisors were then interviewed. A semi-structured interview technique was used, which meant that all interviews contained the same questions in the same order, but different follow-up questions were allowed.

The researchers were constantly aware of their own roles in the project and therefore worked together with the participants. With the three themes as a basis, the current situation was discussed and the consequences of introducing change were identified. Together, recommendations were developed for introduction of supervisors and the continuation of work within the caregivers' working group.

Example 8A
Study using action research as the research method [13].

Example 8B
Study within social
care with action
research as the research
method [21].

Through action research, this study aims at answering three questions: How can the views of young people be taken into consideration when developing social work practice? What preconceptions of young people do social workers bring to their work? and finally how these conceptualisations and views interact?

The research took place in Iceland where the author worked directly with social work practitioners, examining the ways in which social workers conceptualize childhood and children and what this means for developing social work practice. The action research approach in this case also included engaging young people, who had interacted with social services, as research consultants. The aim was to get the opinions of young people with inside experience of social work and to present these to practicing social workers, who following this were asked to change their practice accordingly.

In the study, this approach is evaluated, with a focus on its usefulness for the development of social work practice but also as a method of generating new knowledge.

A major criticism of educationally based action research is that the credibility of the research process and the results will be negatively affected when the action researcher has the dual roles of researcher and educator. Because the research is conducted within a specific operative unit, it is difficult to transfer the results to other operative units.

Moreover action research is occasionally criticised for lack of development of theory and poor documentation of the research process [13].

Action research compared with quality development

Action research is often compared with quality development/quality assurance but there are several differences between these two methods, some of which we describe below.

Action research is usually initiated in response to a mutual problem which has been identified by a social group. The problem may be unclear and vague and change during the cycle, so that what was considered to be the problem in the beginning may be a quite different problem at the end. In quality assurance however, the problem is usually clearly defined and remains in focus during the whole process. In the planning phase, action research is based on a critically aware action while this stage of quality assurance comprises supervision and collection of data.

The results of a quality assurance project can either show improved methods of comparison or improved quality of a service. Quality assurance tends to result in improved standardised work routines within an organisation. The results of action research contribute to development of theory, either new theories or further development of an existing theory. In general, action research leads

primarily to improved working conditions and social conditions for the members of the group.

For action research to be considered successful, both interventions and development of knowledge are necessary. In quality assurance, the cycles may be static over time and need not necessarily include any interventions. In general, quality assurance has a much more rigid structure for completion of the project. In contrast, action research is flexible and allows continuous overhaul.

The narrative method

The narrative method is suitable for use when the aim is to increase knowledge about meanings and patterns in people's descriptions of themselves and their lives. There is no individual single narrative working method, but several complementary methods which are all based on the philosophical and theoretical foundation that human understanding has a narrative form. Some examples of narrative data analysis are presented here [11].

The whole is maintained in the narrative

The researcher tries to discern what characterises the narrative as a whole. In a study on retirement, with special reference to changes in daily activities and patterns of activity, twelve people were interviewed three times. The interviews comprised open questions, such as "Describe what an average day is like for you these days". The method of analysis was to retain the description as a whole and analyse basic narrative characteristics, such as direction, structure, plots and turning points. The results of the analysis disclosed that differences in structure were the most pronounced feature of the narrative.

Categorise first and then interpret on the basis of narrative starting points

In the initial step the material is analysed and systematised with the aid of a qualitative method for building categories and themes, for example the constant comparative method or qualitative content analysis. The data material is then categorised into main and subcategories. Thereafter the categories are interpreted according to narrative theory. The categories are placed in a theoretical frame of reference and form a whole.

Understanding events from a narrative perspective

This method can be used to understand both concrete events and different processes. For example one can investigate what happens in a treatment situation by trying to understand if/how isolated events can be associated with and integrated into the larger life story for the client. Several ethnographic studies of treatment situations involving occupational therapy rehabilitation have used the narrative strategy as a basis for understanding.

Example 9A
Study using the narrative method as a research method [11].

In a study investigating pathways out of substance abuse and homelessness from an activity perspective, data were collected by means of narrative interviews with two formerly homeless women. The interview guide comprised open questions in order to capture the informants' stories. The researcher used follow-up questions to encourage the narrator and to ensure that all topics listed in the interview guide were covered.

The analysis began with the aid of the constant comparative method. The data were analysed in different stages and then compared with the transcribed interview. Thereafter the material was interpreted on the basis of the narrative theory, which means that the material was read several times, in order to gain an overall sense of the whole. The analysis was then conducted in the following four steps.

In the first step, all the material was coded on the basis of the interview text. The codes were allotted to categories. For example, the codes "social contacts outside the narcotics gang" and "narcotics as our little secret" were allotted to the category "double life". Step two comprised comparison of codes and categories, both with each other and with the original material, in order to identify overarching patterns which could intertwine codes and categories to form new themes. Each interview was thematised separately.

In the third step the interviews were combined by comparing all themes, categories and codes, both with each other and with the original data. With the aid of this comparative process, themes common to both interviews were identified; for example "homelessness is a pattern of activity". In order to gain an impression of the overarching coherence in the informants' descriptions, the mutual themes were interpreted as the final step in the analysis.

Example 9B
Study within social care with narrative method as the research method [22].

The aim of this study was to explore the effects of the foster care experience on foster parents' biological children. The author describes and discusses the losses experienced by the children of foster parents. Eight families, all from the same agency in central Canada had experience of having fostered for at least three years, both with child welfare and probation placements. The children from these families (one youth per family) were interviewed and attempts were made to include all family members in the interviews. The interview was deliberately unstructured, allowing the respondent to develop his/her narrative.

The family narrative was collected, recorded, and analysed in the same manner as the individual child's narrative. After the individual interview each respondent was contacted to summarize the findings of the interview and to explore any areas which were not adequately addressed.

The data was analysed through narrative analysis and the study concluded that the foster care experience can be seen as a blow for foster parents' own children. All interviewed children felt they had lost something through the foster care experience: loss of family closeness, loss of parents' time and attention, loss of place in the family.

Discourse analysis

This concept is controversial and not entirely unambiguous. Definitions vary, both with respect to what the concept embraces and the importance of discourses. One definition of the term discourse is “*a particular way of describing and understanding the world (or some part of the world)*” [30].

Discourse analysis is a method of critically reading texts. The researcher seeks to understand how and why language is used as it is. Meanings and patterns are analysed. The function of discourse analysis is to identify and describe discourses. Characteristic for a discourse analysis is that it treats texts as data. The aim of discourse analysis is not to disclose what people really mean, or the way things really are, because the social constructionist foundation for discourse analysis means that this “reality” does not exist. The only reality is language and how this represents the world. Therefore language is a construction and all we can study is just how different expressions or discourses are constructed [11].

References

See main document, page 39.

Appendix 5.

Quality assessment check-list for qualitative research studies – patients' and clients' perspectives

SBU's check-list for quality assessment is an adaptation based on previously published material [1,2].

Author: _____ Year: _____ Identification no: _____

Overall assessment of study quality:

High

Moderate

Low

Instructions:

- "Unclear" is used when the information is not retrievable from the paper.
- N/A (not applicable) is used when the question is not relevant.
- There are comments of clarification to some of the questions. These are found at the back of this document.

Yes No Unclear N/A

1. Aim

a) Is the study based on a well-defined statement of the problem or a well-formulated research question?

Comments on aims, discussion of problem, research questions, etc

	Yes	No	Unclear	N/A
2. Sample selection				
a) Is the sample selection relevant?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Is the method of selection clearly described?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) Is the context clearly described?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Is a relevant ethical discussion included?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) Is the relationship between the researcher and the selected sample clearly described?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments on sample selection, patient characteristics, context, etc				
3. Data collection				
a) Is the data collection procedure clearly described?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Is the data collection relevant?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) Has data saturation been achieved?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Has the researcher managed his own pre-understanding in relation to the data collection?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments on data collection, data saturation etc				
4. Analysis				
a) Is the analysis clearly described?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Is the method of analysis relevant in relation to the data collection procedure?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) Has saturation in terms of analysis been achieved?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Has the researcher managed his own pre-understanding in relation to the analysis?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments on method of analysis, saturation etc				
5. Results				
a) Are the results logical?				
b) Are the results comprehensible?				
c) Are the results clearly described?				
d) Are the results presented in relation to a theoretical framework?				
e) Is a hypothesis, theory or model generated?				
f) Are the results transferable to a similar setting (context)?				
g) Are the results transferable to a different setting (context)?				
Comments on the clarity, adequacy etc of the results				

Comments of clarification to the Quality assessment check-list for qualitative research studies – patients' and clients' perspectives:

1. Aim

The following aspects should be considered:

- the aim of the study
- why it is important
- its relevance
- whether qualitative research methods are appropriate for investigating the field/answering the research question.

2. Sample selection

The following aspects should be considered:

- whether the researcher has presented the background to the chosen method of sample selection
- whether the researcher has presented the procedure for selecting the participants
- whether the researcher has presented the reasons for selecting the participants
- whether the researcher has stated the number of participants selected
- whether the researcher has described whether anyone declined to participate and if so, why
- whether the researcher emphasises ethical aspects in more detail than merely “informed consent” and “ethical approval”
- whether the researcher has described the relationship between the researcher and the informant and how this might have influenced data collection, e.g. a debt of gratitude, dependent relationship etc.

3. Data collection

The following aspects should be considered:

- if the setting for data collection was justified
- if the method used to collect the data is described (e.g. in-depth interview, semi-structured interview, focus group, observations, etc)
- if the researcher has motivated the choice of data collection method
- if it is explicitly disclosed how the selected method of data collection was undertaken (e.g. who conducted the interview, how long the interview took, whether an interview guide was used, where the interview was conducted, how many observations were made, etc)
- if the method was modified during the study (if so, is it described how and why this was done)
- if the collected data are clear (e.g. video or audio recording, notes, etc)
- if the researcher has discussed whether saturation has been reached, i.e. when further data collection does not yield any new data (not always applicable)
- if an argument on saturation is applicable, consider whether it is reasonable, i.e. actually validated on good grounds.

4. Analysis

The following aspects should be considered:

- if the analytical process is described in detail
- if the analytical process is in accordance with any theoretical explanation or proposal on which the data collection was founded
- if the analysis is based on a theme, is it described how this theme was arrived at?
- if tables have been used to clarify the analytical process
- if the researcher has critically reviewed his own role, potential bias or influence on the analytical process
- if there is saturation of analysis (is it possible to find more themes based on the citations presented?).

5. Results

The following aspects should be considered:

- if the results/findings been discussed in relation to the aims of the study or the research question
- if adequate reasoning about the results is presented or if the results comprise merely citations/presentation of data
- if the results are presented clearly (e.g. is it easy to distinguish between citation/data and the researcher's own input)
- if the results are presented with reference to the theoretical explanation or proposal on which the data collection and analysis were based
- if adequate data have been presented to support the results to what extent contradictory data have been highlighted and presented
- if the researcher has critically reviewed his own role, potential bias or influence with respect to the analytical process
- if the researcher has discussed the transferability of the results or other areas of application for the results.

References

1. Bahtsevani C. In search of evidence-based practices: exploring factors influencing evidence-based practice and implementation of clinical practice guidelines. Malmö: Malmö högskola; 2008.
2. Willman A, Stoltz P, Bahtsevani C. Evidensbaserad omvårdnad. En bro mellan forskning och klinisk verksamhet. Studentlitteratur; 2006.