Research Critique of “Caught in the middle:
Experiences of tobacco-dependent nurse practitioners”

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Data Collection Methodology

Several methods exist for collecting data for a research study, including “physiological, observational, interviews, questionnaires, and records or available data” (LoBiondo-Wood & Haber, 2006, p. 320). The method chosen by Heath, Andrews, Kelley, and Sorrell (2004) was interviews, a method involving a variety of verbal questions asked of subjects. These researchers conducted face-to-face interviews as well as interviews “via online chat rooms” (p. 398). Each interview, lasting about one hour long, began with the main question: “Tell me about what it is like being a health care provider who smokes” (p. 398).

The chosen data collection method for a research study “must be appropriate to the problem, the hypothesis, the setting, and the population” (LoBiondo-Wood & Haber, 2006, p. 319). Heath et al. (2004) proposed a qualitative, phenomenological research study with the purpose of “[exploring] how tobacco-dependent NPs describe their own experience of tobacco dependence and how that experience affects the delivery of smoking-cessation messages to patients” (p. 398). The study sought to understand human experiences and behaviors as described by each participant. LoBiondo-Wood and Haber (2006) claimed that the best way to gain such understanding is “through intensive dialogue” (p. 154). Interviewing allows researchers to have detailed discussions with participants, which can be much richer than written questionnaires. Also, while conducting interviews researchers have the opportunity to “clarify misunderstood questions and observe the level of the respondent’s understanding and cooperativeness” (p. 327). These characteristics are major strengths for interviewing, which proved to be an appropriate data collection method for this study.

No matter the chosen method, data collection must be “objective and systematic,” meaning “not influenced by another who collects the information” and “collected in the same
way by everyone who is involved in the collection procedure” (LoBiondo-Wood & Haber, 2006, p. 317). Typically, these criteria might pose a greater obstacle with interviews, which can be more difficult to control when multiple researchers are involved. To counteract such difficulty, Heath et al. (2006) designed a “semistructured interview guide” so that each interviewer would ask similar questions (p. 398). In addition, each interview was transcribed word-for-word and later reviewed by all of the researchers during the data analysis process. These measures helped to ensure that the interviews were both objective and systematic.

An important component of data collection is reaching data saturation. LoBiondo-Wood and Haber (2006) defined data saturation as when “ideas surfacing in the dialogue are ones previously heard from other participants” (p. 156). In other words, no new data is revealed and old data is repeated. This information determines that enough interviews have been conducted and enough data has been collected. Though the researchers do not overtly articulate how or when data saturation was obtained, certain signal phrases in the research article do indicate to the consumer that by the end of the 12 interviews, no new data was being uncovered and no additional interviews were necessary. Such phrases included: “all of the participants discussed various physiological and psychological aspects of living with tobacco addiction;” “all of the participants experienced…professional and personal struggles with knowing the consequences of smoking…;” and “none of the [nine] female participants thought they looked like a typical smoker” (Heath et al., 2004, p. 398-399).

Data Analysis

LoBiondo-Wood and Haber (2006) described that qualitative research studies seek to “describe in as much detail as possible” certain phenomena (p. 177). As a result, data is most often analyzed continuously throughout the study and subsequently reported in the form of
conceptual themes. Three major criteria exist for judging the rigor of qualitative research studies: credibility, auditability, and fittingness (LoBiondo-Wood & Haber, 2006). Credibility is defined as the “truth of findings as judged by participants and others within the discipline” (p. 168). Heath et al. (2004) achieved credibility by giving summaries of the transcribed interviews back to participants for a second look to make sure all of the content was accurate.

Next, auditability means that adequate information is presented to lead consumers “from the research question and raw data through various steps of analysis to the interpretation of findings” (LoBiondo-Wood & Haber, 2006, p. 168). Throughout the article, Heath et al. (2004) included each step of their study. First, a literature review was completed and used to identify gaps in the research. From this information, the purpose of the study and the research question were developed and clearly stated. Then, the chosen qualitative study method, sampling strategies, and data collection methods were discussed. Heath et al. (2004) followed this information with a description of their data analysis procedures: “analysis began during data collection and continued with the researchers reading and rereading the transcripts to gain an overall impression extract significant statements, formalize the meanings of those statements, and organize meanings into themes” (p. 398). The researchers also reported that summaries of the transcribed interviews were distributed to each participant in order to make certain that all content was accurate. From this thorough data analysis process, three themes regarding the lived experiences of tobacco addiction for practicing NPs were ultimately extracted and the results were explained in detail. Finally, the themes were synthesized and conclusions were drawn in order to express implications for practice and further research. From beginning to end, each step of the research process was clearly recorded.
Lastly, fittingness refers to the “everyday reality of the participants” being “described in enough detail so that others in the discipline can evaluate importance for their own practice, research, and theory development” (LoBiondo-Wood & Haber, 2006, p. 168). Through a detailed discussion of the results of the Heath et al. (2004) study and the use of personal quotes from participants, consumers can easily understand the data collected and use that data to draw their own conclusions about relevance to practice and need for further research. The three criteria for judging sound qualitative research, credibility, auditability, and fittingness, are all evidenced in this research study.

**Findings**

After thoroughly explaining each named theme, Heath et al. (2004) briefly summarized the findings of their research study: “In summary, the data revealed that tobacco-dependent NPs, whether currently struggling with the addiction or not, had a keen awareness of the professional implications of their smoking behavior” (p. 400). Also, the researchers noted that most participants “admitted that because of the difficulty of discussing smoking cessation with their patients without sounding hypocritical, the issue was often not addressed” (p. 400). These findings fill the main gaps previously identified as a result of the literature review: that research regarding the smoking habits of NPs was lacking, and that those smoking habits may be hindering smoking cessation interventions.

In addition, LoBiondo-Wood and Haber (2006) expressed the importance of the “qualitative researcher’s role to illustrate the richness of the data and to convey to the audience the relationship between the themes identified and the quotes shared…in order to document the rigor of the research” (p. 177). The findings reported by Heath et al. (2004) in the form of three main themes included exact quotes from participants to show congruence between collected data
and summarized findings as well as to convey the trustworthiness of their data. Using exact quotes reinforces the truth of each identified theme. Thus, the findings of this research study are true to the data collected.

**Discussions, Implications, and Conclusions**

Heath et al. (2004) dedicated the last section of their research article to applying the findings of their study to the field of nursing and to the need for further research. By connecting the study’s results to ways in which those results can be applied in the clinical setting, the researchers gave consumers important information to take to their own practice. Implications for practice from numerous studies have shown that tobacco-dependent nurses tend to avoid smoking-cessation interventions with patients. Perhaps those nurses “may first need support to stop their own smoking habit” (Heath et al., 2004, p. 400). Thus, the results of this study suggest such support should “be offered to nurses and student nurses by their respective employers and educators” (p. 400). In addition, a list of questions was presented at the end of the article in order to encourage a continuation of this matter in further research.

To conclude the article, Heath et al. (2004) broadened the implications of their study’s findings to include more than just tobacco-dependent NPs. They recognized the influence coworkers can have on one another and reinforced the importance of supporting tobacco-dependent NPs in their quest to quit smoking. The researchers wrapped up their article with a call to action to other non-tobacco-dependent NPs to “look for more opportunities to [ask] their health care colleagues” about “personal health behaviors” (p. 400).

**Overall Quality**

Heath et al. (2004) proposed and executed a study concerning an area of research for which little to no previous data existed. Their study was clearly presented from beginning to end
in a well-written research article. Perhaps one weakness of the study is that the reliability of its results cannot fully be established; no other studies exist to either support or refute the findings. However, such is the essence of qualitative research to explore unknown territory. Generally speaking, qualitative studies yield a lower level of research evidence, as the more theoretical data does not consist of exact numbers and figures. Such exact figures are often called “facts” and “proof” by unknowing consumers, but all research findings, though suggestive of certain results, can never capture the full spectrum of truth. There are and will always be “extraneous variables” and “unknowns” to take into consideration. Nevertheless, qualitative research is essential to developing a foundation upon which research can expand. According to the standards presented by LoBiondo-Wood and Haber (2006), this qualitative research study has done exactly what it should have. Heath et al. (2004) have laid precedent for further studies, thus contributing to the development of both nursing knowledge and practice.
References
