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REVIEW ARTICLE

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CONCERNS IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AND NURSING SCIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Qualitative research methods become increasingly popular in nursing. However, most of nursing students have argued and debated about issues and meanings of the qualitative research in nursing science. This article is noted to discuss the qualitative aspects and concerns.

Keywords: qualitative research, nursing, nursing science

INTRODUCTION

An enormous proliferation of nursing studies using qualitative research method is very common in recent years, which is a part of undergraduate and postgraduate studies. The quality of research based on such methods is a great value for nursing that addresses individual holistically. This kind of research will be a basis for nursing science – ‘the standpoint’, which will also provide the informative data about the uniqueness of human beings

for the best nursing care. The purpose of this paper is to begin that discussion by primarily focusing on the standpoint. First, key aspects of qualitative study are presented, then concerns are raised for discussion.

KEY ASPECT OF QUALITATIVE STUDY

The need of qualitative study has been increased to answer the need of human being. Qualitative study seeks to

understand an individual's perspective, experience, and uniqueness that seems to have an important place in nursing science. While nurses also take an account on an individual's preference, respect and promotion of the patient's rights and decisions. Patient-centered care is kind of the principle of both. On the other hand, qualitative researchers also argue that nursing could be applied to their research approaches.¹ Porter (2000)² also mentioned that it could be even be that the use of qualitative research will come to distinguish nursing knowledge from the sort of knowledge that other, more mechanistically orientated, health professionals aspire to.

To understand the root of knowledge of qualitative study, there are some philosophies underpinning. *Ontological assumption* poses the question "What is the nature of being, reality, existence? What can be known about it?" Qualitative researchers will answer that nature of being is multiple realities, which are very subjective. Concerning with what constitutes reality or what is, researchers need to take a position related to the perspectives of how things really are and how things really work. In *epistemology*, which concerns with the nature and forms of knowledge. Epistemological assumption poses the question "What is truth? What is real knowledge? What is the relationship between the researcher and what is being studied?" qualitative researchers will answer that there is no one truth, but multiple truths/realities. Truth is subjective to each person. The other paradigm underpinning qualitative study is axiology, which its assumption poses the question "What is the role of values?" Qualitative researchers will answer that facts cannot be separated from values. Things cannot be described as they really are, but only how we perceive them. There is no such a thing as absolute objectivity.

Values are entrenched with everything. Related to nursing, the philosophy underpinnings qualitative research is the same with philosophy in nursing, which there is no one truth, but multiple truths or realities. The way to describe things is not based on they really are, but how we perceive them.

To understand individual or phenomenon in a holistic view, the qualitative researchers use an emergent design of data collection or triangulation. It does not mean lack of attention or focus. Rather, the researchers want to base their enquiries on realities and viewpoints of those being studied, and these might not be apparent at the outset of the study. The most common data collections used in qualitative study are interview and focus group. The basic principle in data collection of qualitative study is investigating in natural setting; the place or the environment that individual is used to be. There is no control and manipulation. The investigation is understanding complex relationship rather than explaining a single relationship.

The finding of qualitative study is narrative-descriptive, which is based on the rhetorical that its philosophical assumption poses the question "What is the language of research?" The qualitative researchers will describe that the language of research is to write narratively. However, the qualitative study is flexible and context sensitive.

CONCERNS IN QUALITATIVE STUDY

The standing point that the qualitative research is a basis having an important place in nursing science could not be ignored. The understanding of the uniqueness of each individual with the patient-centered principle is an art of nursing, which is expressed by the individual nurse through creativity.

However, nursing is widely considered as an art and science. It could not be separated.

Science in qualitative study has been argued and debated among philosophers and researchers. It is argued that science is concerned with rigor, and by definition; good rigorous research must be reliable and valid. If qualitative research is *unreliable and invalid*, then it must not be a science.³ On the other hand, science consists of systematized knowledge, which is organized, classified and more, rather than less and exact. An intrinsic dynamic of science is to achieve higher levels of abstraction, increasingly powerful axioms generalizable to more and more of the universe.

However, it is argued that the characteristics of qualitative research as scientific or unscientific would then depend upon which definition of science is used. The concept of methodical, standard procedure of fixed steps, systematic and knowledge are complex. While qualitative research method is flexible, open, unstructured, or unstandardized, context-sensitive, and depend on the personal interaction of between subject and object.⁴ A rejection of qualitative research as unscientific reflects a specific limited conception of science, rather than the meaning of science in the topic of continual clarification and discussion. Therefore, Polkinghorne⁴ argued and advocated an understanding of science, which is *“science is not seen as an activity of following methodological recipes that yield acceptable results. Science becomes the creative search to understand better, and it uses whatever approaches are responsive to the particular questions and subject matters addressed. Those methods are acceptable which produce results that convince the community that the new understanding is deeper, fuller, and more useful than the previous understanding”*.

Secondly, collecting data by interview is considered not objective, but subjective, which different interpreters find different meanings. It is all dependent on the interpreters. It tends to be bias. However, we may differentiate between *a biased subjectivity* and *a perspectival subjectivity*.⁴ A biased subjectivity is unprofessional work, selectively interpreting and reporting statements justifying their own conclusions; readers only notice evidence that supports their own opinions.⁴ Otherwise, a perspectival subjectivity is appearing when readers adapt different perspectives and pose different questions to the same text come out with different interpretations of the meaning. It could be said that subjectivity in this sense of multiple perspectives interpretations is one of the strengths of the interview. Moreover, philosophy of qualitative research indicated that there is no absolute truth because we cannot judge the other interpretations are right or wrong.

Thirdly, the findings are not generalizable; there are too few subjects. It is considered to be the weakness of qualitative study. Most of people like to see the results of research can be generalized, as a universal knowledge. However, Sandelowski⁵ distinguishes between the generalizability of quantitative findings and that of qualitative findings. Generalization in quantitative findings is characterized by establishing universal laws for populations based on information from samples deemed to be similar to those populations, and it cannot be achieved with qualitative findings. Otherwise, qualitative findings are not generalizable in the prevalent sense of the word; they do not provide laws or relationships that can be taken from a single sample and applied to entire populations. But, rather, they are generalizable in a way that is particularly pertinent to nursing practice, in which there is an expectation that scientific

findings, and nursing care itself, be tailored to unique individuals in their distinct contexts. It provides idiographic knowledge about human experiences to readers, who can apply the findings to the care of individuals who are in situations similar to the situations that the findings came.

Fourthly, attention to reliability and validity of qualitative study has been directed. Generally, reliability is defined as the extent to which the results of a study or a measure are repeatable in different circumstances, and validity is the degree to which a study accurately reflects the specific concept that the researcher is attempting to measure. Some argue that validity and reliability are important in qualitative research. However, the terms reliability and validity seems no essential criteria in qualitative study, rather the terms credibility, neutrality or confirmability, consistency or dependability, and applicability or transferability.⁶ The examination of trustworthiness is crucial to ensure reliability and validity in qualitative research. It also states that establishing the trustworthiness of a research report lies at the heart of issues conventionally discussed as validity and reliability, which is also a central to any conceptions of quality in qualitative research.^{6,7}

In conclusion, a qualitative study is appropriate for nursing, both art and science. Understanding the individual in a holistic view is essence for nursing, which will lead the creativity of nurses to give a best nursing care. The findings in

qualitative study may not be generalized, but rather to provide knowledge based on the distinct context of the uniqueness of human beings.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

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Authorship Contribution

All authors contributed equally for analyzing, reviewing, and drafting the manuscript.

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