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Rigor: An Essentiality in Qualitative Research

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We read with interest the article by Jin and associates¹ recently published in the current issue of Innovations in Pharmacy. The authors make use of qualitative research design which is considered to be the best suitable option in exploratory, descriptive studies. In order to evaluate the research question both in depth and breadth and as well as to extract ideas and thoughts from information rich cases, qualitative research provides a methodical understanding of the research problem. In the current study¹ semi-structured, in depth interviews were conducted to expand the research objectives, which facilitate the assessment of both prompted and unprompted expression and minimize the conceptualize boundaries.

In this letter we would like to accentuate the issue of rigor in qualitative methods which is questionable in the eyes of 'ardent believers of numbers' in research. In a general review Seale and Silverman outlined the modus operandi that can help to improve the reliability and validity of qualitative data.² The utilization of detailed transcription techniques, schematic plan of systematic coding by means of computer programs, as well as counting in qualitative research were reviewed by Seale and Silverman as modalities to ensure rigor in qualitative research.² Likewise, MacLean and associates pointed out that the combination of verbatim transcription and researcher's observation of non verbal behavior of the respondents is contributory to the validity and reliability of qualitative data generation.³ Although of little significance, the process of interview transcript review is also meticulous in enhancing rigor in qualitative methods.⁴

The most important aspect of any research is sample size which is always a point of concern in qualitative research. The idea of sample size in qualitative research is dependent on the distinctive variability of the target population⁵. The process of interviewing, whether in the focus groups or one-to-one interviews generally continues until the point of saturation is achieved. The point of saturation is, in fact, a peak after which no new information is considered to be expected and, therefore, is thought to be a gold standard for

the determination of purposive sample sizes in qualitative health research⁶.

To be precise the exploratory work of Jin and associates¹ is a mere reflection of rigor right from data collection, analysis, and interpretation in qualitative research design. Moreover, the concept of a journal (under its Science section) to welcome researchers from both paradigms and submit their work from various methodological designs⁷ deserves special praise.

Note: The Discipline of Social and Administrative Pharmacy, Universiti Sains Malaysia is a unique blend of expertise of both qualitative and quantitative research experts who give mixed methodological guidance to postgraduate students from 12 countries

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