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Meta-ethnography reporting Guidance (eMERGe)

Background

Evidence-based policy and practice require robust evidence syntheses which can further our understanding of people's experiences (e.g regarding healthcare). Meta-ethnography is a seven phase qualitative evidence synthesis method, developed by Noblit and Hare (1988). The approach, although devised in the field of education, is now used widely in other disciplines including health research. Meta-ethnography reporting – especially of the analytical processes and findings - has often been of poor quality, and this discourages trust in, and use of its findings. A bespoke meta-ethnography reporting guideline is therefore needed to improve reporting quality.

Objectives

The eMERGe study followed a structured process to develop an evidence-based meta-ethnography reporting guideline in order to improve reporting quality.

Methods

This study (<http://emergeproject.org/>) used a mixed-methods design in line with good practice in reporting guideline development. It comprised of: (1) a methodological systematic review of guidance in the conduct and reporting of meta-ethnography; (2) a review and audit of published meta-ethnographies to identify good practice principles; (3) consensus studies to agree guideline content; (4) development of the guidance for dissemination.

Results

Results from the methodological systematic review and the audit of published meta-ethnographies revealed that more guidance was required around the reporting of all phases of meta-ethnography conduct, and in particular phases 4-6 (relating studies, translating studies into one another and synthesising translations). Following the guidance development process, the Meta-ethnography Reporting Guidance was produced, consisting of 21 items grouped into the 7 phases of meta-ethnography. The importance of considering context during each phase of meta-ethnography conduct has also been highlighted.

Conclusion

The Meta-ethnography Reporting Guidance can help reviewers to report the important aspects of meta-ethnography. It is hoped that use of the guidance will raise meta-ethnography reporting quality, and facilitate the use of meta-ethnography evidence to improve practice, policy and service user outcomes in health and other fields.