Undergraduates' experience of preparedness for engaging with sensitive research topics using qualitative research

Kerri L. Simpson & Kevin Wilson-Smith

This research explored the experience of five undergraduates who engaged with qualitative research as part of their final dissertation project. There have been concerns raised over the emotional safety of researchers carrying out qualitative research, which increases when researchers are inexperienced making this a poignant issues for lectures teaching qualitative research methods (Daley, 2012; Haverkamp, 2005). Undergraduates typically have the least research experience; limited research to date has been published into the experience of undergraduates carrying out potentially sensitive research. The following superordinate themes emerged in the lived experiences of the sample: Permissive factors; Protective factors; Coping strategies; and Difference between methodologies.
Keywords: *Emotional research; ethics; qualitative; research risks; sensitive research; undergraduates.*

Introduction

RECENT RESEARCH has highlighted concern regarding the emotional safety of researchers carrying out qualitative research (Daley, 2012, Dickinson-Swift et al., 2007, 2009; Fahie, 2014; Haverkamp, 2005); these risks to researchers are increased when the an individual is inexperienced and is interviewing participants about potentially sensitive topics (Daley, 2012; Dickinson-Swift et al., 2007, 2008; Elmir et al., 2011).

Lee (1993) suggests an encompassing definition of sensitive research, 'research which potentially poses a substantial threat to those that are or have been involved in it' (p.4). This introduces the notion that qualitative research can be emotionally challenging for researchers, especially when interviewing. There appears to be a number of subjective factors (see Lee, 1993; Lee & Renzetti, 1990, for examples) that effect how engaging in sensitive research impacts on the experience of both participant and researchers. Lee (1993) believes it is important that the same courtesy offered to participants (e.g. protection from physical and emotional harm throughout the research) should be afforded to researchers, a belief

shared by others in the field (Daley, 2012; Dickinson-Swift et al., 2007, 2008; Elmir et al., 2011; Fahie, 2014; Haverkamp, 2005).

Difficult ethical and emotional choices occur when ethical codes give insufficient or ambiguous guidance (Haverkamp, 2005). Daley (2012) suggests that a single set of ethical guidelines for all research based on quantitative principles to inform qualitative research does not acknowledge the active role that qualitative researchers take, nor equip researchers appropriately for qualitative research (Daley, 2012, Haverkamp, 2005). Some experienced researchers describing transcribing as a stage when feelings that are locked away during interviews surface, the act of repeatedly listening to the recording of the interview causing researchers to re-experience emotions, or experiences, related to the interview (Dickinson-Swift et al., 2007). Dickinson-Swift et al. (2008) argue that the emotional well-being of the researcher is not considered in a rigorous manner with Elmir et al. (2001) suggesting that those with minimal experience are at greater risk of negative emotional impact. It would therefore seem reasonable

that those with the least experience should have the most comprehensive protective factors in place, thus questioning whether current models of academic supervision are adequate.

As psychology undergraduates have minimal independent research experience prior to carrying out their final dissertation project they are situated at a higher risk than other researchers in the field, in spite of this almost all research investigating the topic has focused on post graduate researchers (Daley, 2012, Dickinson-Swift et al., 2007, 2008, 2009; Elmir et al., 2001; Fahie, 2014; Haverkamp, 2005). This study offers an in-depth exploration of the lived experience of five undergraduate psychology students who used qualitative research techniques as part of a third year dissertation project.

Methodology
The study used semi-structured interviews, which were analysed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). A purposive homogenous sample of five participants were recruited, with a prerequisite that all participants had completed a dissertation at undergraduate level using qualitative methodology within the last three years. Of the participants three were female aged 21 and two were male aged 22 and 24; two participants used thematic analysis, one following face-to-face interviews investigating experiences, one gathered data regarding participants opinions via an online questionnaire; one participant used discourse analysis to analyse participant views from online forums and the final participant employed grounded theory to analyse participant experience by means of face-to-face interviews.

Semi-structured interviews that ranged from 26 to 65 minutes were carried out as means of data collection, this gave the advantage of enabling the researcher to build rapport participants, and allow participants to discuss what they feel is important, crucial if the researcher is to gain an insiders perspective of the phenomena in question. (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008;

Willig 2008). Pre-prepared semi-structured interview schedules, as suggested by Smith et al. (2009), were crafted to be open, expansive, non-leading and non-value laden in order to encourage participants to talk at length (Smith et al., 2009).

Smith et al. (2009) suggests that flexibility in data analysis for IPA is acceptable, mindful of this the authors of the current study followed the suggested strategies of Smith et al. (2009) allowing flexibility in the analytical approach in order to make certain that the focus of the findings remained on the lived experience of participants. Stages of analysis comprised of listening to the recording of the interview and making preliminary reflexive notes. The next stage was transcription, involving consideration to what is half said or even omitted from speech, pauses, rushing through speech and the tone of voice, these are all part of a well rounded understanding of participants meaning. The use of a reflexive diary helped to safeguard against the researchers thoughts unwittingly becoming part of the findings.

Stage two began with a re-reading of the transcript and notes to identify emergent themes using differing identifiers so primary and secondary notes could be distinguished and compared. Stage three employed the cut and paste method (Smith et al., 2009) to contemplate emergent themes first highlighting and noting text position, then physically cutting up the text. During this process primary and secondary notes were referred to and important themes that had not necessarily been included were noted at this stage. Transcripts were rechecked, those themes that the researcher interpreted as holding significance for the participants, even if only mentioned once were included (Smyth et al., 2008). Emergent themes were related back into the sum of the transcripts to ensure that phenomenological meaning was not lost in the course of analysis (Smith et al., 2009). As suggested because of the ideographic commitment of IPA the first case was examined in detail before moving on to the second and subsequent cases (Smith et al., 2009).

The fourth stage comprised of drawing connections between the emerging themes, considering themes in light of their relationship to one another. It became noticeable that some subordinate themes clustered together and superordinate concepts emerged, in other cases emerging themes merged, as they were close enough in nature to become a single theme.

A master table of all of the superordinate themes was then created with subordinate themes listed below them. To ensure validity a full table including superordinate and subordinate themes with all illustrating quotations was created as stage five of the process.

Analysis and discussion

During analysis four superordinate themes were identified, 'Permissive factors', 'Protective factors', 'Coping strategies' and 'Difference between methodologies', each of which involved a number of subordinate themes.

Permissive factors

The first superordinate theme is that of Permissive factors and includes five subordinate themes, Lack of experience, Closeness to research, Disconnection from support, Transcription, and Emotional Hangover. Havercamp (2005) states that researchers are left with difficult choices if ethical codes offer little or ambiguous guidance. Learning about ethical guidance and process whilst at university should ideally give guidance on the range of possible risks both to participants and researchers, acting as a filter to help mitigate against potential risks (Dickinson-Swift, 2007). Permissive factors permit incidents that could threaten physical or emotional wellbeing of a researcher (Lee, 1993). This superordinate theme explores emotional permissive factors (as physical threat seems well covered within the BPS code of conduct; BPS 2009, 2010).

Lack of experience

An important first step in qualitative research is awareness of the unique ethical challenges posed (Havercamp, 2005), one of these challenges is that emotions need to be taken into account when designing, carrying out and writing up qualitative research (Dickinson-Swift, 2009). On reflection it maybe the case that the ability to have this level of emotional ability is taken for granted, and there for an emphasis should be placed on an academic input on the emotional challenges faced when interviewing.

When exploring Bea's prior experiences of interviewing for research Bea did not recall having participated in interviews as an undergraduate.

> 'I don't think so? I know some groups did but I can't remember if I was in any of them?' **Bea 2:39:17–20**

Anna's description of interviewing provokes a picture of wanting reassurance from a more experienced other, and as an extreme ordeal.

> 'that was a lot of the problem because you can tell neither of us sort of knew what we were doing (…) I didn't have somebody to look back to kinda like "Help"'. **Anna 3:68:22–25**

> 'it was a bit of a baptism by fire'. **Anna 3:69:01**

Anna's use of this phrase brings with it a suggestion of a difficult trial she was undergoing for the first time.

Closeness to research

Dickson-Swift et al. (2009) suggest that valid qualitative research should be experienced emotionally as well as intellectually, however this can lead to an over involved, compromised situation for the researcher (Lee, 1993). This emotional closeness increases if the researchers have strong feelings about the research (Elmir et al., 2011) making it difficult for researchers to separate themselves from emotional aspects of the research; this risk is increases when interviewing participants (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009).

Sven felt that he was distanced from his data because of the collection method used, however Sven still struggled when it came to the thoughts and opinions of participants.

'*some parts had an impact, (…) you cant just think ooh well that's your opinion (…) you have to think about the implications (…)you have to really take in that (…) and try and think of it as your own for a minute to then try and understand it.*' **Sven 1:07:14–22**

Bea did not feel close to her research, she describes how and why she chose the subject in a flippant manner, suggesting no emotional ties to the research. When talking during the interview Bea was disconnected from the research topic, more passionate about difficulties with the research technique.

'*just because like I read in the news a lot of parents were complaining about her (…) before I could think of anything else I thought lets go with that.*' **Bea 2:38:02–06**

In contrast to Bea, Anna talked at length and with passion about her research, her speech pattern, the speed at which she spoke, and her body language all displayed that she felt the importance of her research.

'*I suppose it is dehumanising to a point because they're a statistic they're a figure, they're a participant in a study without realising that these people are, (…) human lives with their suffering they might end up being reduced to something in a paper.*' **Anna 3:60:20–24**

Anna's use of the term 'cutting the cord' gives and image of mother and child, being tethered emotionally, Anna suggests that it is easier to distance herself from quantitative research.

'*I think quantitative is fine but it does effectively reduce people to numbers (…) if you are asking them about their feelings and (…) you have to watch them get upset and angry and frustrated and distressed with everything (…)*

that in itself makes you care more because if everybody is a number you can then crunch the numbers and do a few graphs and it's oh well that's it done and you can forget about it because it lets you cut the cord whereas with qualitative you don't.' **Anna 3:64:04–13**

With this in mind it is easy to see the importance of good supervision that understands not only the research question but also the student researcher who may feel emotionally tied to the research.

Disconnection from support

Disconnection from support differs from a lack of support in that it is an active maladaptive process. Dickinson-Swift et al. (2009) suggests that the culture in which researchers work is one that is still dominated by the ideology of empirical science, suggesting that emotionality in research will contaminate it. The issue of becoming emotional was common during the interview, however none of the participants approached anyone for emotional support.

Bea describes crying during the research process. When asked if she asked anyone for support Bea suggested that she had to learn to close off to her emotions. Later, Bea describes turning to the teaching staff for help with technical aspects of research. That Bea engaged with staff for technical but not emotional support suggests she actively chose not to engage in emotional support.

'*No (…) you just learn to shut off.*'
Bea 2:43:03–11

'*Few tears, erm lot of shouting (…) I think once you do have your cries and your tantrums about it the you got a clear mind and you can get on with it until the next moment when you break down.*' **Bea 2:45:15**

While Anna seemed to cope well and actively used support, this was in regard to practical issues; emotionally Anna made an active choice not to seek emotional support.

'it was more that I was using it as fuel for the actual proposal (…) for everything at the end that I had to say "and this is where we're going wrong" I suppose really it gave me focus'. **Anna 3:66:09–12**

Myra acknowledged the disconnection, suggesting that one of the factors leading to it was a lack of feeling supported, but another is her own personality preventing her from engaging with that support.

'I just don't think that I was particularly supported (…) maybe just the person that just sits back and tries to get on with it.' **Myra 4:92:22–24**

'I just don't think that my supervisor was particularly supportive so I didn't see the point'. **Myra 4:104:10–11**

Changing the culture surrounding the type of support given in psychology may be an important step in engaging students to seek emotional support during research, whilst not all students might need emotional support in connection to research it is important that for emotional work the support forms part of the process of research.

Transcription

Dickson-Swift et al. (2007) suggested transcription to be one of the most difficult aspects of research because of the potential emotional impact on the researcher, finding that some researchers used the transcription time to allow themselves to react emotionally to the research.

Anna did not have direct contact with the population group her research related to, so it was when transcribing and relating the interview text back to previous research that she felt the emotional impact.

'I think I got more out of my depth when I was actually transcribing it and relating it to my research because you think shit this is actually happening for so many years why is nobody stopping it.' **Anna 3:76:06–09**

'it's easier to just walk away and think it's a bit conversation but when you are transcribing it you are rehashing it, now a lot of the time you are on your own in a quiet room so you're forced to think and then you sort of realise, shit this is people's lives.' **Anna 3:76:18–21**

Emotional hangover

Sensitive research has the potential to be emotionally impactive on any that are involved in the research (Lee, 1993), Dickson-Swift et al. (2009) acknowledge the emotional empathy developed during the research process, while an important factor, leaves researchers emotionally vulnerable. Sven and Bea did not report any 'emotional hangover' or left over feelings, this may be because they did not meet their participants who were offering opinions rather than experiences.

Anna carried her emotion about the research openly, the connection she felt, the frustration, and the revelation of what she had been exposed to through the research.

'it is dehumanising (…) because they're a statistic they're a figure, they're a participant in a study without realising that these people are, (…) human lives with their suffering they might end up being reduced to something in a paper, but ok so why aren't we looking at it further why are we leaving it as research that isn't being followed up on why aren't we intervening socially.' **Anna 3:60:20–25**

Myra describes uncovering a problem, feeling that she should do something about it but then refers to herself as 'little' suggesting feelings of insufficiency.

'It puts a bit of pressure on you because it's should I be doing something about this? Cause I know that there's a problem but how can just one little person do that?' **Myra 4:89:25–02**

Protective factors

The second superordinate theme is Protective factors and includes four subordinate themes, Degrees of Separation, Participant Gain, Prior Knowledge, and Tutor Support.

Protective factors mitigate against permissive factors, qualitative research presents different opportunities but also different risks to both researchers and participants (Haverkamp, 2005), it is important that researchers prepare for these differences (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009). None of the participants when designing their research built in or considered protective factors, however protective factors were still found.

Degrees of separation

Sensitivity is subjective, both for participants and researchers (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007). Within this research, researchers who were the most emotionally distant were the least emotionally affected by their work.

Sven conducted his research via online qualitative questionnaires; this removed him from the nucleus of the research by several steps, exploring opinions rather than experiences online, without a voice recording to listen to.

> *'I think it would be more uncomfortable to sit through that rather than read it.'* **Sven 1:19:01–02**

Bea's use of forums was also a protective factor in that she was several steps removed from participants investigating opinions rather that experiences.

> *'maybe if in a proper on line bit when a persons saying horrible things about that woman then I might have been more affected by it but as I was just reading it on a screen then…'.*
>
> *R: 'You felt one step removed?'*
>
> *B: 'Yeah, yeah I did.'* **Bea 2:41:07–13**

Bea admitted not really caring about her research, and this lack of emotional investment also acts as a protective factor.

> *'I remember my struggle with actually finding something like as a (…) I think maybe I should have done something that I cared more about.'* **Bea 2:50:18–21**

While Anna was emotionally invested in her research, she examined experiences, through the filter of another person's experience of working with the subjects at the heart of her research.

> *'because they all were adults and they were like a step removed I was then another step removed.'* **Anna 3:67:17–18**
>
> *'It was a bit of a buffer really so it was pretty much, I think the distance allowed me to still be ok because otherwise you do make their problems your own even if you think oh well I can't it's not my problem it still happens.'* **Anna 3:78:17–19**

Participant gain

For some participants research is one of the few or the only chance they have to discuss a topic (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007). It is little wonder then that for participants the interview can be a therapeutic process (Elmir et al., 2011).

Anna's recognition that her participants gained from her research afforded Anna the feeling of giving back.

> *'when I spoke to the actual teams themselves they were more than happy to speak to somebody because I think again its like pent up rage they never get listened to so when somebody says can we talk, it's like yes thank god we can talk.'* **Anna 3:69:01–04**
>
> *'if I was doing it and I was the only one gaining from it I ca'nt imaging they'd have been very happy because it would have been like "OK so we have taken time out of our busy day at work, you know our time our money to help you with what to do what, what am I getting back?" and obviously it is a two way street.'* **Anna 3:74:15–19**

Prior knowledge

Dickson-Swift et al. (2009) suggest that being prepared for the emotional impact of research can lessen the emotional impact on the researcher. One participant interviewed

during this study seem to have suffered little emotional impact from the research carried out despite having shared the experience of her participants, perhaps because she had heard it all before.

Myra had spoken with her participants as friends prior to interview, which may have protected her emotionally.

'I mean with my cousin I was quite surprised, well I wasn't surprised because I knew it before but if I'd been told it off the bat like there and then if she hadn't been a relation, that would have really surprised me.' **Myra 4:85:08–11**

Tutor support

It is important to recognise the different support needs of researchers (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009) and give them a clear pathway to support (Dickson-Swift et al., 2008). While all participants in this study found the support from the university useful it is important to recognise that they did not access any specifically emotional support.

Anna describes her support as essential as staff were the only ones in her eyes that could completely understand.

'the only people that have fully understood what I've been talking about have been lecturers so both my supervisors have been great to talk to.' **Anna 3:70:09–11**

While Myra didn't feel supported by her supervisor, she did acknowledge that there were other options for emotional support, another staff member, or peer support.

'I probably wouldn't have went to like them [supervisor] first, I probably would have went to [course leader] (…) cause I felt, or [student name] or [student name] probably that's really bad that but.' **Myra 4:103:15–18**

Coping strategies

The third superordinate theme, Coping strategies, had two subordinate themes, distancing self from research and accessing support. Dickson-Swift et al. (2009) suggest

that researchers should find strategies to manage their own emotions; one strategy participants used was emotional separation from the research. Accessing support is also a purposeful strategy that participants could choose, Dickson-Swift et al. (2009) found that a lot of support was done informally, but suggest this is inappropriate, stressing the importance of acknowledging researchers support needs.

Distancing self from research

Anna was very emotionally affected by her research, finding active ways of distancing herself emotionally during and after the research process.

'I've also gone on Facebook and done pointless trivial tasks because it made my brain switch off from being study mode and I could just go back to being the twenty year old basically normal woman.' **Anna 377:13–15**

R: 'So almost disconnecting yourself?'

A: 'Yep pushing away.'

R: 'from the sensitive research you were sort of doing?'

A: 'for my own mental health.'
Anna 3:77:19–20

'I got to the point where I started realising there's so much you can do and dwelling (…) its not gonna help anybody it's not gonna help me it wont help them it's not gonna do anything in the long term but damage based on my own mental health (…) it's more like a distant memory as opposed to an active part of my thought process now.' **Anna 3:79:05–11**

Myra emotionally distanced her self by focusing on text and linking that to former research, rather than the emotional content of the research.

'because I was thinking right I got my research I need to pull out things that are linked to my

research, like I was quite (…) I wanna say robotic, but I wasn't really like concentrating on what the meaning of the words I was looking for the key words maybe rather than the actual…' **Myra 4:88:13–16**

Accessing support

Dickson-Swift et al. (2008) insist that support pathways should be clear and accessible to researchers. Some researchers in this study were not clear about the route to support they did access formal and informal support. Dickson-Swift et al. (2009) highlight a growing acknowledgment of potential need for therapeutic support for researchers when carrying out sensitive research, and that duty of care owed to researchers by universities is equal to that owed to participants.

Sven was unsure of the pathway to follow if he needed ethical or emotional support. Not classing casual support as support, talking it over was just his way of working.

'I don't think at any point I was given if any thing like this happens phone this number, if anything like this happens you need to phone this number or send an email to this person or we have someone at the uni who deals with this kind of enquiry.' **Sven 1:28:04–07**

'I talked over it with people (…) It was more actually about a working process of you bouncing off your friends and family colleges (…) and then say I'm going to format it in this way I don't think at any point I was using it as support.' **Sven 1:28:15–19**

Anna did feel she needed support and found it in her tutors who were the only ones she believed that would understand, but still did not use them for emotional support.

'the only people that have fully understood what I've been talking about have been lecturers so both my supervisors have been great to talk to.' **Anna 3:70:09–11**

Myra broke down at one stage because of a build up of pressures. While this was an emotional need, it was in relation to deadlines and personal situations. Myra turned to her Mother for support.

'I think I was in tears just like one day I was like "I can't do it" (…) my mum was like "you've only got another couple of weeks until you've finished so just carry on s" yeah I don't yeah just my mum.' **Myra 4:98:06–16**

Myra admits that if she had needed to she would have used peer support.

'I probably would have went to someone on the course rather than a lecturer I think (R: Yeah) like probably [student name] or [student name] to be honest like, I would have been "oh my god what's just happened?"' **Myra 4:103:07–09**

Difference between methodologies

The fourth superordinate theme, Difference between methodologies, includes three subordinate themes, Practical, Ethical and Balance. All participants in this study felt that qualitative methodology was treated differently to quantitative, with less time and attention paid to it. Some felt that because of their choice of method they had more ethical constraints placed on their research, Daley (2012) states the use of the same ethical guidelines for both quantitative and qualitative research methods does not allow for differences in research, both in technique and what the method is trying to achieve.

Practical

Practical differences between methods are many and varied this can lead to practical difficulties when carrying out qualitative research, Myra commented on carrying out qualitative research to a quantitative time-table stating that this was a disadvantage

'I was probably spending more time writing up my (…) rather than writing up the bulk of my dissertation and sending that in so I think I didn't really send that much in I hadn't even written half of it when I sent that draft in.' **Myra 4:97:24–02**

Sven felt that his methodological choice was a source of constraint and this hindered the practical elements of his data collection.

'it also takes away my power in a research role to give prompts and to facilitate getting further information and what I need information.' **Sven 1: 03:20–22**

'I thought qualitative was the best way to access the question there was a few points where I thought why the hell did I not just distribute this to extra people have less of a farce with ethics, send out some forms, do some stats.' **Sven 1:13:16–18**

Ethical
Qualitative research is based on different paradigms to quantitative. Tthe entire approach to research and participants is fundamentally different (Willig, 2008) yet ethical approval is based on the same criteria as quantitative. This can lead to misguided constraints being put in place and some ethical considerations being missed (Dickson-Swift et al., 2008).

Sven felt that some of the ethical limitations put on his research had a negative outcome, limiting his findings; Sven was unsure why these constraints were placed upon his research.

'one of the stipulations of my ethical, the ethical thing of it was to, I had to distribute it um almost like in batches, I wasn't allow to do it over internet forums I wasn't allowed to put it directly on to my face book or anything erm and to be honest even I'm not entirely sure why I couldn't do some of those things you know.' **Sven 1:12:14–18**

'I felt like I aught to have just been told not to do qualitative even though that's my interest and for that kind of question that's what I thought was the best option, I'm glad I did do it, but I almost I almost feel like…' **Sven 1:14:06–09**

Bea had considered the ethical implications of her research as far as her participants

were concerned. She did not consider how it might affect the wider population of forum users or any risks that she might face.

'Well there was obviously not going to be any harm to the participants because like they didn't even know they were taking part, they'd written it and put it out there for everyone to see. I don't think I'd thought about any ethics toward myself.' **Bea 2:47:04–07**

'I can't remember even talking about that in Uni, if there was any damage like caused to the um like interviewer.' **Bea 2:47:20–22**

Myra did not consider the risk to herself as the researcher either, stating that it was not discussed at university.

'We never really got told about that side of it I don't think, I can't really remember getting told about preparing emotionally so… maybe we should have.' **Myra 4:87:16–17**

Myra was carrying research on a topic that she herself had recently experienced, but was not warned of the ethical risks

'you know this could be quite upsetting for you and my dissertation supervisor she never said anything like you need to be careful, this could bring up some, if you've had such a hard experience like with your, if you've had a hard experience it could bring up some of that back, they never, not one person said it to me once.' **Myra 4:96:01–05**

Balance
While the traditional method of choice has been quantitative, a steady increase in the use of qualitative research methods have meant that it is now taught at undergraduate level. However the learning was considered imbalanced by the participants who found that there was a bias toward quantitative teaching.

Sven suggested that there was unfair favouritism towards quantitative methods and that the choice of qualitative as a dissertation method put him at a disadvantage.

'the method itself which I ended up using was pretty much the best I could have went for without having to jump through a tonne of hoops which yeah I think well if you're doing qualitative I think as I say I can understand it, if you hand out a form it's really impersonal (…) it's not that I can't understand the reason why but I, I do feel like it's a constraint.'
Sven 1:14:17–22

'I almost feel like for your undergraduate dissertation you choose qualitative you're almost choosing the wobbly road (R: laughs) rather than the straight forward road, and I'm not saying it's harder or easier.' **Sven 1:29:19–22**

Bea agreed with Sven's sentiments bemoaning the lack of teaching time.

'It's like if you did quantitative you got more training.' **Bea 2:51:12**

Myra felt that lack of support and time doing qualitative methodologies lead to anxiety.

'No definitely not, especially in second year cause I remember being so stressed out in that for that end of year exam we'd barely done any qualitative research the whole year (…) I didn't feel prepaid for that exam at all (…) I don't think we were particularly supported with qualitative research at all (…) I can't remember any qualitative lessons so, we did in first year but I don't think we really had any in second year, like I remember being very stressed out about that exam in the second year, I'm sure that's why [daughters name] was born two and a half weeks early.' **Myra 4:93:05–20**

Conclusions

This research found that participants were not severely emotionally distressed by their experience of qualitative research, but experienced a range of insecurities about preparedness to conduct sensitive research were experienced by the participants. There is an assumption that researchers are experienced enough to make judgements in the best interest of participants (Daley, 2012) yet we argue that curriculum delivery needs to ensure that tackling sensitive research becomes a core focus of qualitative methodological pedagogy.

Ethical guidance based on empirical scientific belief systems leads to a focus on developing ethically sound procedures and proposals (Daley, 2012; Haverkamp 2003), yet does not provide researchers with guidance on carrying out ethically sound interviews (Daley, 2012). Researchers should therefore assess the potential impact of emotional as well as physical threats that might impact on their own wellbeing. The authors would suggest building in protective factors as part of the core learning outcomes of qualitative methods modules.

It is important that there is an equal consideration for the emotional protection of the student researcher, in addition to that naturally afforded to the participant (Daley, 2012; Dickinson-Swift et al., 2007; Elmir et al, 2011; Haverkamp, 2005; Lee, 1993). Haverkamp (2005) suggests that as qualitative methods are so varied, and still evolving rapidly, this precludes the establishment of a detailed structured guide. Instead, ethical issues that are distinct to qualitative research should be approached from a distinctive qualitative perspective, with researchers enhancing their own awareness of issues in the context of their research, and from a wider emotional perspective. It is of course important to note that quality academic supervision is key to ensuring the safety of undergraduate research students, and the aim of this study is not to underplay the importance of the lecturer-student supervision process. Instead we hope to encourage reflection around ways in which teaching sessions can be developed specifically to challenge the issue early on in the undergraduate's academic career so that it becomes instinctively part of the reflexivity process.

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