

## Letter to Editor

### Some Challenges in the Qualitative Studies

To the Editor,

On October 10, 2018, the journal of “Nursing and Midwifery Studies” published a paper about “Women’s understanding and cultural practices related to vaginal discharge: a qualitative study”. In the paper, there are some challenges that are worthy to be noted.

#### Theoretical saturation or data saturation

In the paper, the authors stated that they have applied “theoretical saturation” in a descriptive qualitative study; while it seems that they have used “data saturation”. There are four types of saturation:

1. Theoretical saturation: This type of saturation is used to develop the categories and emerge a theory in the analysis process and theoretical sampling should be applied
2. Inductive thematic saturation: This kind of saturation focuses on the identification of new codes or themes and is based on the number of such codes or themes rather than the completeness of existing theoretical categories
3. Priori thematic saturation: in this method, data are collected so as to exemplify theory, at the level of lower-order codes or themes, rather than to develop or refine theory
4. Data saturation: in this way, saturation is considered as a matter of identifying redundancy in the data and there is no need to reference to the theory linked to these data.<sup>[1]</sup>

This misunderstanding is, also, observed in other qualitative studies.

#### Focus group dissections or/and individual interviews in the sensitive issues

Although the authors have stated that research on vaginal discharge is considered a sensitive topic, they applied focus group discussion (FGD) as the only method for data collection; in other words, they did not use individual interviews beside of FGDs. There are different and ambivalent viewpoints regarding appropriate methods for researching sensitive issues

in the literature. Some factors, such as the nature of the topic, the research design, the make-up and size of the groups, are important in designing a FGD in the sensitive issues.<sup>[2]</sup> As homogeneity (everyone [is] in the same boat) and small size of the groups in these topics could enable participants to gain mutual comfort and facilitate disclosure and discussion.<sup>[3]</sup> In this regard, the authors in the results section stated that “Most of the women expressed that they had a previous history of vaginal discharge”; in other words, it seems all women that participated in the study did not have the same experience about vaginal discharge and homogeneity did not observe in the groups.

Overall, it is believed that both FGDs and individual interviews are necessary for data collection in the sensitive issues; because on the one hand, participants discuss and rephrase each other, therefore, views, opinions, and social aspects of the issue could reveal in greater complexity than one-on-one interviews. On the other hand, details of personal experiences that are not possible to be explained in FGDs could discuss in the individual interviews.<sup>[4]</sup>

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#### Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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