The Emotional Impact of Conducting Violence Research

Wednesday, September 24, 2014 12:30PM-1:30PM  Rm. 2339 F/A Bldg

Researchers increasingly recognize the emotional challenges that emerge when conducting ‘difficult’ research on topics such as violence and trauma. The purpose of the current study was to examine the emotional challenges of conducting both qualitative and quantitative violence and trauma research. Semi-structured qualitative interviews (n=34) were used to examine the experiences of research team members’ working directly with participants and the impact of the study’s quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method orientation on their experiences. The purposefully selected sample of adults worked as research assistants, interviewers, or study clinicians (6+ months). Although some emotional challenges were more frequently identified by those working on primarily quantitative studies (e.g. difficulty remaining objective, the toll of working with larger numbers of participants) many challenges were identified by those working on both quantitative or qualitatively-oriented studies (e.g. difficulty seeing/ hearing about certain types of trauma, difficulty with participant’s reactions [e.g. crying or no emotional reaction at all]). Findings suggest emotional challenges are an important and often overlooked aspect of quantitative research. These challenges need to be taken into account by investigators planning both quantitative and qualitative research on violence and other emotionally sensitive topics.

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Stella Resko received her Ph.D. in Social Work from Ohio State University (2007) and completed a post-doctoral research fellowship at the University of Michigan Addiction Research Center (2007-2009; T32 award NIAAA). She is currently an assistant professor at Wayne State University jointly appointed to the Merrill-Palmer Skillman Institute and the School of Social Work. She previously worked at a community-based drug and alcohol treatment program (Maryhaven) on several studies that were part of the National Institute on Drug Abuse Clinical Trials Network. Her research interests focus on substance use and interpersonal violence among adolescents and adult women. Dr. Resko’s research is guided by a socio-ecologic framework and focuses on better understanding the social context and patterns of substance use and violence. She is particularly interested in community based intervention and prevention research focused in urban, low income communities.

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