Correspondence

Need for & use of guidelines for reporting qualitative research

Sir

The article by Mishra N.N. et al\(^1\) touches upon an important area of knowledge and attitudes of mental health research among health care professionals who carry out research in psychiatry. The tools used are two questionnaires; one that assessed the knowledge of informed consent guidelines and the attitudes of researchers toward them, and the second that addressed the knowledge regarding confidentiality protection guidelines and attitudes relevant to their implementation and interpretation. The rate of verbal consent was 62/121 (51.2%), but only one fourth [31/121; 25.6%] eventually completed the study. The source of the questions used in the questionnaire (mentioned only in the abstract) is stated to be prominent guidelines (which are not listed). What is not mentioned in the paper is the validation of both questionnaires; for content, criterion or construct as also assessment of reliability. While criterion validity may not be applicable in the present case in the absence of a “gold standard”, it would have been interesting to know how content and construct were validated. For concepts like informed consent and confidentiality, both these would be important. A study by Boynton and Greenhalgh\(^2\) has outlined the use of a ten point checklist that could critically appraise whether a questionnaire met all requirements right from the research question and study design to analysis, interpretation and conclusions. Guidelines also exist on the peer review of manuscripts that contain qualitative research such as the RATS guidelines\(^3\). Qualitative research involves the reporting of complex phenomena. Similar to the CONSORT guidelines for reporting of quantitative research, the answer likely lies in the use of checklists such as the COREQ (developed for interviews and focus groups) to improve reporting quality and indirectly improved conduct of qualitative research\(^4\).

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Authors’ response

Thank you for comments on our article\(^1\) which are very informative and rightly indicate some of the limitations of the study. As written in the abstract the questionnaire was based mainly on the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) guidelines. In brief, the questionnaire was designed on the basis of ICMR guidelines\(^2\) regarding informed consent and confidentiality. The authors and research staff in the department of Psychiatry of our hospital employed a discussion process and achieved consensus regarding question content. The content experts are actively engaged in mental health care and research, and regularly use the ICMR guidelines in their professional
practice. Three of them are members of institutional ethics committees.

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