**A qualitative exploration of the impact of visible differences upon intimate relationships: methodological reflections**

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**Purpose:**

This paper considers the methodological choices and implications inherent in conducting qualitative research. Focussing on a sensitive topic with participants who have a visible difference, it examines issues and challenges relevant to the recruitment of participants, sample size and data-saturation, considers the use of individual interviews and scrutinises the decision to offer participants a choice of how to participate in the study.

**Background:**

Existing research highlights a link between visible differences and challenges with intimacy and intimate relationships and has been conducted through both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Much of this research, however, has not focussed specifically on intimacy and visible differences and so further exploratory investigation was required.

**Methods:**

Participants were recruited through placing advertisements with a variety of relevant support groups and organisations. Each participant was individually interviewed using a flexibly applied semi-structured interview schedule. Participants were offered the choice of whether to participate through the medium of a phone interview, a skype interview or by speaking in person.

**Conclusions:**

The research generated strong interest and a good response. The data collected were rich and detailed. This confirms that hard to reach participants can be accessed via organisations they may have an association with. Furthermore, high quality qualitative data may be collected by phone and skype as well as face-to-face interviews. Offering participants a choice about the medium of interaction can be both empowering and convenient for participants. Sample size and saturation are issues that remain challenging for qualitative researchers but are ones which must be addressed.