Trends in qualitative research prevalence and type in UK ophthalmology

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Introduction

UK research funders and policy makers are increasingly clear on the value they place in qualitative research.[1] Semi-quantitative survey instruments, such as patient reported outcome measures and satisfaction surveys, are common manifestations of qualitative research which offer standardised outcome measures. However, they do not offer the sensitivity required to explore how healthcare interventions should be implemented in real-world care and the consequences these interventions may have across out complex healthcare systems.[2]

Barriers against publishing qualitative clinical research have been described elsewhere, but the nature and frequency of semi-quantitative or qualitative data collection methods are not yet established in UK ophthalmology.[3]

Methods

Abstracts presented at Royal College of Ophthalmologist (RCOphth) congresses from 2013-2019 were identified. Associated peer-review publications were identified and characterised. Each abstract was reviewed for the presence of semi-quantitative or qualitative data collection methods. Survey methods exclusively collecting objective data regarding care pathways or epidemiology (e.g. BOSU studies) were ineligible.

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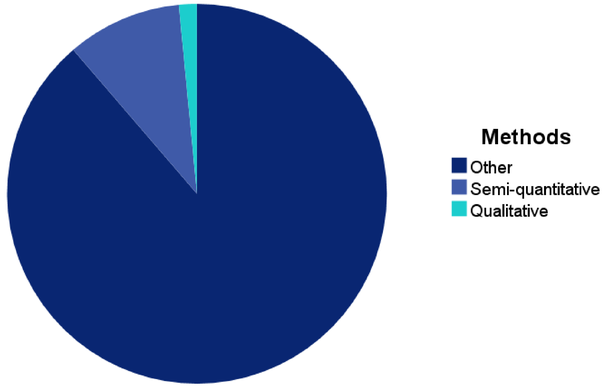


Figure 1: Pie chart showing cumulative proportion of qualitative and semi-quantitative research methods at RCOphth and congresses 2013-2019

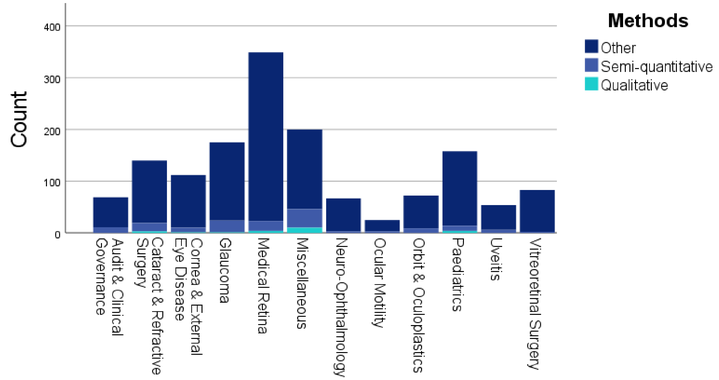


Figure 2: Research methods used in abstracts, split by subspecialty

Results

Of 1504 abstracts, 170 (11.3%) made use of semi-quantitative or qualitative data collection methods. 23 (1.5%) included semi-structured interviews or focus groups (Fig.1), 10 (43%) of which were not attributable to a particular subspeciality (Fig.2).

Thirty percent of these 170 abstracts were published in peer-reviewed journals with a mean impact factor (IF) of 1.706, compared to 27.0% of the 1334 residual abstracts published in journals with a mean IF of 2.426. There was no significant trend in the frequency of abstracts containing semi-quantitative and qualitative data collection methods over time, nor interviews and focus groups specifically.

Conclusions

- UK ophthalmic research using semi-quantitative or qualitative data collection methods appears to be published no less frequently, albeit to lower impact journals.
- Qualitative ophthalmic research has limited representation despite well-established value in healthcare innovation.
- The UK Ophthalmology research community should consider interventions to promote qualitative research

References

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