

Approaches to Decreasing Emotional Burden During Qualitative Interviews to Improve Data Quality and Participant Engagement

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Introduction

- Qualitative interviews can be emotionally challenging at times and may elicit negative feelings such as sadness, anxiety and shame
- Mitigating participants' emotional burden during interviews is in accordance with research ethics^{1,2} and can improve data quality³ and participant engagement^{4,5}
- Although suggestions have been made to decrease emotional burden, no studies have synthesized the research to develop guidance on how to decrease emotional burden for participants during qualitative interviews

Objective

- Develop guidance for interviewers for decreasing participant emotional burden during interviews and enhancing data quality via a targeted literature review

Methods

- Embase, Medline, PsycNet, and Google Scholar were searched from 1988 to November 2024
- Keywords included: sensitive, ethical, benefit, emotional, well-being, vulnerable, positive, interview, qualitative research, and clinical trial
- English language articles discussing approaches to handling participants' emotions during interviews were included
- Articles about the interviewer's emotions or describing guidance before or after an interview were excluded

Results

- Of the 54 abstracts identified, 25 met inclusion criteria for full-text examination (**Figure 1**)
 - 9 general guidance for interviewing
 - 8 literature reviews
 - 2 clinical trial research studies
 - 5 non-clinical research studies
 - 1 case study
- Five themes emerged on decreasing emotional burden for participants in interviews (**Figure 2**)
- There were no articles that elicited interviewee feedback on what techniques should be used during interviews

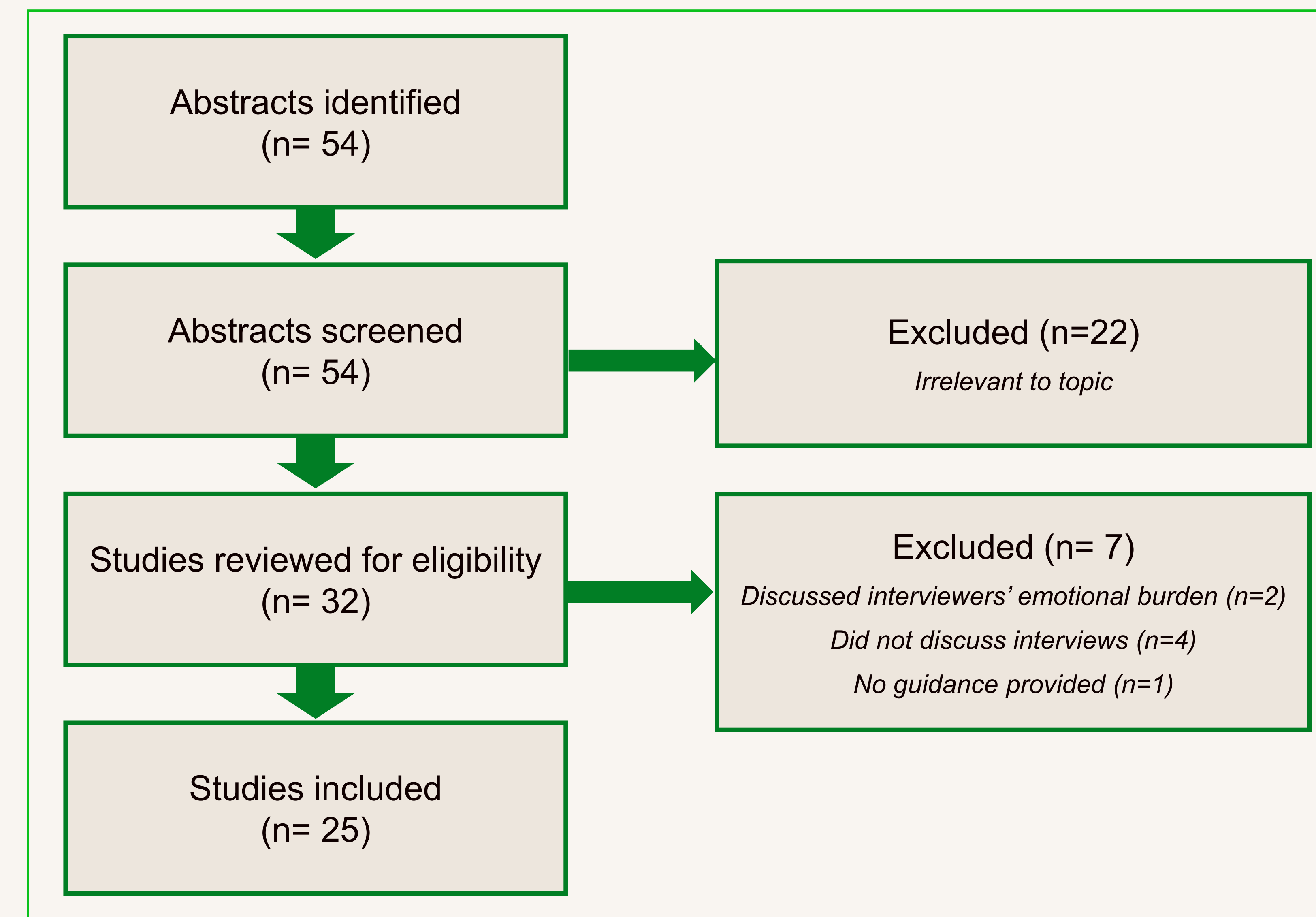


Figure 1. Flow Diagram of the Literature Review Process



Figure 2. Mitigating Emotional Burden Guidance

Conclusions

- Decreasing emotional burden during interviews requires flexibility, emotional attunement, and knowledge of professional resources
- Qualitative studies should focus on eliciting the interviewee's perspective about what techniques “work” for decreasing emotional burden using cognitive interviews or questionnaires
- Guidance is needed to address specific ethical dilemmas that may arise during interviews within a clinical trial. Examples include reporting study partner distress or handling questions that result in emotional burden for participants

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