Operationalisation of realist synthesis as a PhD student; what works, for whom, and in what circumstances?

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INTRODUCTION

Operationalisation of realist methods can be challenging (Dalkin et al., 2015). Protocols and standards exist in the literature to guide the process of realist informed research (Greenhalgh et al., 2011, 2015; Rycroft Malone et al., 2012; Saul et al, 2013; Blane et al., 2015). Realist methodologies are advocated for the exploration of complex interventions, in a variety of subject areas and the application of these protocols and standards is likely to require individually tailored approaches. This heterogeneity is challenging for realist novices, especially those who find themselves working on research as doctoral students, and so mo lone than is the norm in realist research.

OBJECTIVE

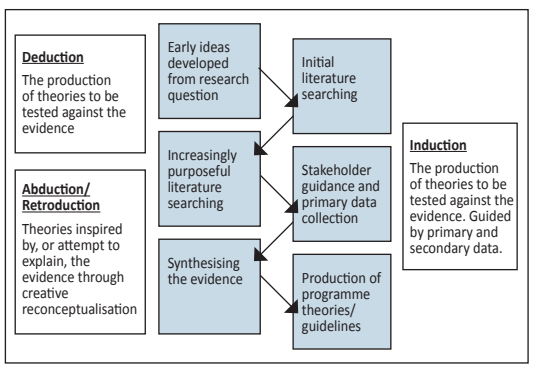
This poster illustrates the va approaches taken by three doctoral students applying realist methodologies as part of a PhD.

METHODOLOGY

roject 1: Susan Somerville

e mobile clinical skills and simulation facility was unique in the UK at the time of its launch (2009), and is now the subject of this PhD. Published literature is very limited regarding mobile simulation, so grey literature, field trips and stakeholder interviews are the sources of data indorsed as part of a realist synthesis. The realisation that the collection and analysis of such data for theorizing was validating and was pivotal in my developing understanding. This PhD was originally designed to be sequential; a realist synthesis which would inform a realist evaluation. The sequence and weighting of this 2-part study is generating much reflecting, reasoning, mediating and judgement within this team of student and supervisors, none of whom are experienced realists.

Project 2: Christina Cooper



As a PhD student new to both realist methods, and the subject area, prevention of risk behaviour in adolescents, a large amount of time was spent submerged in the literature. Unfamiliarity with the specifics of the subject impacted on both retroductive theorizing, and application to ethics in order to carry out consultations with key stakeholders. A key issue in this was reaching an agreement on when consultation becomes primary data in relation to research governance. Addressing and resolving methodological issues is an ongoing process.

Project 3: Sarah Wilmot

Saul et al's (2013) protocol for a rapid realist review (RRR) suggests a composition of essential team members. My RRR was undertaken as part of a PhD, therefore, instead of engaging a local reference group and expert panel throughout the RRR as Saul et al. (2013) suggest, guidance was sought from the PhD supervision team, who have a breadth of knowledge of care planning and realist methodology and thus fulfil the role of the local reference group and expert panel.

DISCUSSION

Looking for alist recipe is a natural yearning as a PhD student who is unfamiliar or uncertain about using this methodology. Three PhD students have undertaken different approaches to their realist studies modifying the standards, protocols and methods to find a bespoke way to explore their respective, unique and complex interventions with a realist lens. The acceptance of uncertainty and the importance of theorizing from a plethora of sources is fundamental for realist doctoral student

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