

A Research Teams' Reflections on Conducting Emotionally Demanding Research with the Bereaved

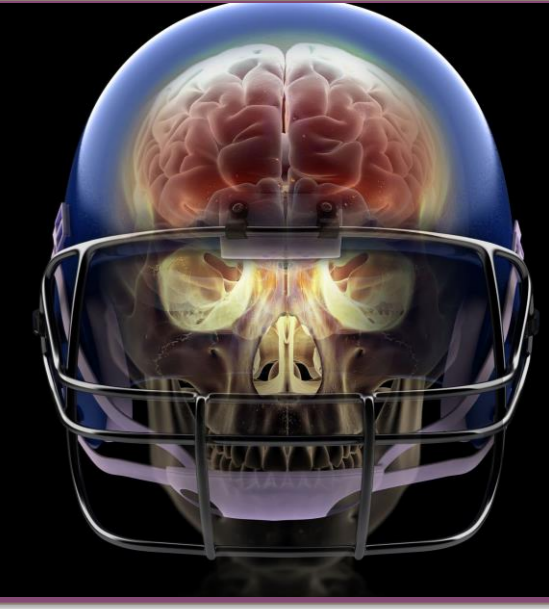
Batey, Jo; Szedlak, Christoph

Publication date:
2022

This document version is the:
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Find this output at Hartpury Pure](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Batey, J., & Szedlak, C. (2022). *A Research Teams' Reflections on Conducting Emotionally Demanding Research with the Bereaved*.



A Research Teams' Reflections on Conducting Emotionally Demanding Research with the Bereaved

Dr Jo Batey

Introduction	Methodology & Methods	Results	Discussion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although research in some domains (e.g., health-care professions) has recognized the repercussions of conducting emotionally demanding research (EDR) on researchers, this has yet to be considered in sport or exercise domains. As such, we leave researchers open to experiencing and living with the effects of their vulnerability when the research has ended. Despite more advanced understanding of the existence of researcher vulnerability in some fields, this has not translated to moves to safeguard researcher wellbeing which has largely been ignored at both individual and institutional levels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The work was underpinned by interpretivism, specifically ontological relativism and epistemological constructivism. Six research team (RT) members travelled to a conference to interview family members bereaved through the repercussions of traumatic brain injury caused by contact sport. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the RT upon their return. Post-conference some of the RT conducted online interviews with bereaved family members unable to attend the original conference. These RT members were re-interviewed. 	<p>Four themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognising Vulnerability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Naivety Under Prepared Experiencing Vulnerability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emotional Labour Vicarious Trauma Dual roles Coping with Vulnerability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-Care Social Support Detached Vulnerability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This research supports findings in other fields which demonstrate that researchers can be significantly vulnerable when deeply engaging with participants and listening to stories of grief and trauma (e.g., Johnson & Clarke, 2003; Wray et al., 2007; Woodby et al., 2011; Howard & Hammond, 2019). Various pathways to vulnerability were identified when interviews were conducted face-to-face. Secondary trauma was less evident when interviews were conducted online, although there was a perception that data quality was negatively impacted. There is a need for better preparation and support at both individual and institutional level for researchers who open themselves up to such vulnerability.

Conducting emotionally demanding research made research team members **vulnerable to secondary trauma**. Coping strategies employed were **informal, reactive, and insufficient** to address researcher **self-care and wellbeing**



THEME 1 - RECOGNISING VULNERABILITY

"We were thrown in at the deep end to an extent ... It was tough hearing some of the stories and I'm not sure we were quite prepared for how to respond ... We did have a (research team) meeting at the start, but I don't think we really knew quite what it was really going to be like then. And perhaps we researched the wrong things to prepare ourselves. We were researching CTE and trying to understand that. I think we needed to research how to interview people in these situations and how to prepare for it"

THEME 2 - EXPERIENCING VULNERABILITY

"I feel a bit guilty for doing this research. They're really traumatised, really upset ... One side (of me) is saying, "This person is just human, and they just need love and support and care". And then there's another part that's for research going, "I really need to hear what you have to say because I need to write that down as data... And that was quite hard as a researcher... But I just kept going, in my own head, "The long-term impact of this research is more important than my own feelings or individual families""

THEME 3 - COPING WITH VULNERABILITY

"There was one time I went to my room and had an hour. Just away from it all. Just went and changed my shoes, changed my shirt. So physically freshened up to mentally freshen up as well. It felt good to get away. Just to forget about things for a bit"

"And so, I think just being able to go up to each other. You can't do anything about what you've taken on board, but you can certainly say I understand that was tough. I understand that and "it's okay."

THEME 4 - DETACHED VULNERABILITY

"It's much more difficult to get sucked into the emotion, because it's just a person on a computer screen, you know? So, I felt that was easier"

So, I think we've just got to accept that we're going to get nowhere near the depth of data if we do it that way (online) and that needs some thinking about"