

The psychosocial consequences of receiving a false positive result in screening for colorectal cancer

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Conclusion

False-positive colorectal cancer screening can lead to psychosocial consequences. Four overarching psychosocial consequences, also referred to as themes, were identified:

Anxiety
Changed self-perception and behavior

Discomfort
Considerations on participation

Results: Quotes from interviews organized in themes

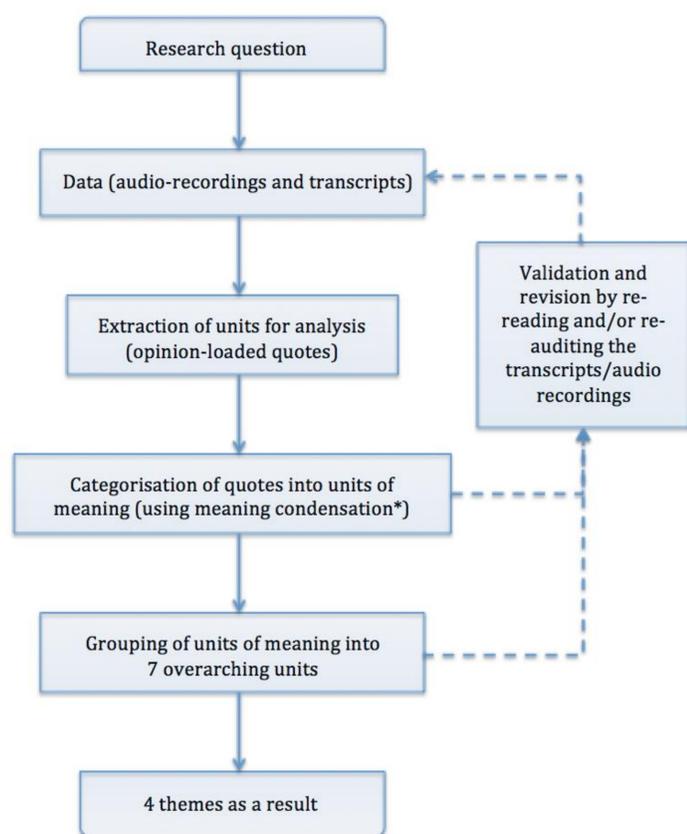


Figure illustrating analysis flow.

ANXIETY: ... , but I got to thinking all sorts of things. I had already died... Several times [in her head]. (...) Right when I got it I thought I was going to pass out – when I read the letter [the notification of the positive iFOBT]. But then, we sat and talked about it for a while, and that made me calm down. It [the anxiety] didn't really reappear until that Sunday. The day before [the colonoscopy].

DISCOMFORT: And I would also think that it was an invasion of my personal space. I thought that too. Definitely. (...) I do think that it was unpleasant. To lie there and be exposed in that end. I sure didn't like that. Yes, I felt... But I would do it again. (...) I think it was more natural to be in childbirth. That didn't feel invasive at the time, even though some might... But it is natural to give birth to a child. This other thing was because of the fact that something might be wrong with your health, right?! That is something else I think.

CHANGED SELF-PERCEPTION AND BEHAVIOUR: [Did being invited (to a new colonoscopy examination) in two years change how you think of yourself as being free of disease?] I hadn't really thought about it like that. But I've... Yes, to be honest. They wanted to keep an eye on that there might be something after all. I'd say that it has left me with doubts. Because it was the only thing, which... Of course I was happy when I heard that nothing was wrong, but then that message [that he was invited to another colonoscopy two years later] came. That didn't make me proud.

CONSIDERATIONS ON PARTICIPATION: [This informant initially chose not to participate and do the iFOBT, but received a second letter]... where I was told to.. or, you know, that it would be good if I did it, and so I did.

CONSIDERATIONS ON PARTICIPATION: Yes, well, in my perspective the good thing is that if you get diagnosed with something serious, then one could only hope and count on that it would have been detected in time or well before that, right? So there could be recovery or something where it went well.

CONSIDERATIONS ON PARTICIPATION: I have to endure it, because they aren't doing it for the fun.

Methods

To elucidate the psychosocial consequences of receiving a false-positive result in the screening for CRC, this study uses qualitative methods. Six semi-structured interviews were conducted of which the four initial were focus groups; the fifth and sixth were single interviews. Reflections on selection, recruitment and grouping of participants in this study were inspired by B. Halkier*, and all interview audio-recordings and transcripts were subjected to qualitative content analysis as described by S. Kvale*.

Background

Colorectal cancer (CRC) is one of the most common cancer types. Because of its high mortality, a screening programme was launched in Denmark in March 2014. Some quantitative international studies and one American qualitative study on the psychosocial consequences of receiving a false-positive CRC screening result were identified, and the results are ambiguous. However, no qualitative and only one quantitative Danish study were found on the subject. As research on other cancer screening programmes report several possible adverse psychosocial consequences associated with receiving a false-positive result, the researchers found this scarcity of literature in the context of CRC screening worrying.

The aim of this study was to reveal the psychosocial consequences of receiving false positive screening result. Our understanding of psychosocial consequences is based on two of three aspects of Engel's Bio-psychosocial model (1977).

*References:

B. Halkier. Fokus Grupper [Focus Groups]: Samfundslitteratur; 2014.

S. Kvale. Interview: Introduktion til et håndværk. [Interview: Introduction to a craft]. Copenhagen: Hans Rietzels publishing company; 2009.