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Conducting cross-cultural interviews and focus groups concerning healthcare with Polish migrants in the UK – Lessons from a study on organ donation

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The Polish migrant community in the UK are under-represented in health and social care research, and are specifically under-researched with the issue of organ donation. **Aim:** To investigate the views of this community further, a qualitative research study examined the attitudes of Polish migrants toward organ donation.

Material and methods: A series of interviews and min-focus groups were conducted with three sample groups. For the first sample, the inclusion criteria was broad, the only requirement was that the participants were English speaking Poles who lived in Luton. The second sample had a tighter inclusion criterion and excluded highly skilled professionals and students and included low skilled workers and parents of young families who were English or Polish speaking and lived in Luton and Dunstable. The third sample was solely post-war Polish migrants who lived in Luton and Dunstable.

Results and discussion: This paper addresses some of the challenges overcome when researching the Polish migrant community, such as withdrawal in the recruitment phase of data collection and the use of Polish translators/interpreters.

Conclusions: The study contributes toward an understanding of the use of Polish migrant communities in health research, use of professional translator/interpreter and whispered interpreters in health research and the challenges of researching organ donation within an under-represented community. Patient education and communication with UK Polish communities is an under-researched area. This study offers some insights into the challenges of engaging with a rapidly growing section of the UK population.

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1. Introduction

In health and social sciences, qualitative research can gain insight into everyday health behaviors and attitudes. Qualitative research on sensitive topics can be challenging for participants and researchers and in the case of the present study, for translators and interpreters as part of the research team. In this paper, we provide the researcher's perspective on researching organ donation with the Polish community and we examine the challenges of: using focus groups as a data collection tool for the Polish community in organ donation research; recruiting and accessing non-English speaking participants; using translators in grounded theory research underpinned by social constructionism; using translators'/interpreters' networks to recruit participants and the power dynamic that may be experienced and the argument for the use of professional translators/interpreters. The challenges encountered add to our understandings of involving Polish migrants in qualitative health and social care research for researchers.

Currently, there is a critical shortage of organs in the UK. There are 7 500 patients on the transplant waiting list and lack of available organs leads to around 1 000 patients a year that die waiting for an organ.¹ To address the organ shortage, the NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT) strategy for 2020² has set out to improve ways to engage with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities that are over-represented on the transplant waiting list and under-represented on the NHS Organ Donor Register (ODR).¹

To effectively engage with BAME communities, an awareness of the each community's perspective on organ donation and transplantation could inform health promotion strategies. Past literature has largely focused on Black African, Black Caribbean and South Asian communities in the UK^{3,4} and the Polish migrant community have been under-represented in organ donation research. To understand attitudes toward organ donation that could have an impact on organ donor registration and family consent behavior where families allow for a relative's organs to be donated, a qualitative study investigated the views of the Polish community in the UK toward organ donation. Extrapolating findings from attitudinal studies conducted in Poland could be argued to have limited applicability to Polish migrants in the UK as the social, cultural, economic, political and religious environment and organ donation policies are different to Poland. To become an organ donor as a migrant may involve different considerations to be made than becoming an organ donor in one's home country.

The Polish community have been migrating to the UK for centuries but most notably the European Union enlargement in 2004 led to a significant influx of Polish migrants into the UK in search of economic opportunities. The recent Census data (2011) indicated the growth and settlement of the Polish migrant population as it reported that Polish is the second most common language spoken in the UK.⁵ Therefore, a significant Polish migrant population in the UK could lead to a need to increase awareness and education about organ donation amongst Polish migrants about signing the ODR whilst living in the UK and family discussion to better prepare

for organ donor requests that could be made to Polish families for relative's organs after death.

2. Aim

There is little research and guidance available informing researchers about the use of interpreters/translators in cross-cultural grounded theory research when researching sensitive topics. The aim of this paper is to examine the practical and ethical challenges of recruiting and accessing the Polish community in cross-cultural qualitative health research.

3. Material and methods

The present study examined Polish migration and settlement and perceived relationships between deceased organ donation, Mauss's (2002) gift-exchange theory and religion from a Polish perspective through focus group interviews and one-to-one interviews.⁶ A focus group interview and one-to-one interview are 'directed conversations' steered by the interviewer that generates research data.^{7,8} Kvale (1996) argued that the interviewer plays one of two roles: the interviewer is a 'miner' where knowledge is 'buried' in the interviewee to be 'mined out;' alternatively the interviewer is a 'traveler,' on a journey with the participant trying to understand the lived world from his or her perspective.⁹

The study took place in Luton and Dunstable, situated close to London. Luton is a large multi-ethnic town with its own university and airport and Dunstable is a smaller neighboring town. Luton and Dunstable were shown as suitable geographical areas to conduct the study based on Worker Registration Scheme data to have a high density of Polish migrants.¹⁰ In total there were three mini focus groups and 21 one-to-one interviews with one mini focus group and seven interviews in Polish. A focus group typically constitutes of 6-7 participants.¹¹ However in the present study mini focus groups were used. Mini focus groups were made up of four participants as this enabled participants to be involved in the study alongside friends or relatives if the participant did not want to be interviewed alone. This was deemed the most suitable strategy for the present study as a pilot study had highlighted two challenges of using focus groups as the main data collection tool. First, Polish migrants work and study long hours and pragmatically it was problematic to organize the focus group and second, we observed that one's religious beliefs were a sensitive topic that participants perhaps did not feel comfortable discussing outside of friends or family groups. A number of participants were 'non-believers' or were not devout Catholics, one participant withdrew from a focus group made up of participants who were strangers and we believe that this was due to the participant being atheist and feeling stigmatized in case she was in a focus group that had participants that were devout Catholics.

Grounded theory methodology guided the research design. Grounded theory is 'a systematic, inductive and comparative approach for conducting inquiry for the purpose of constructing theory.'¹² Grounded theory allows for an exploratory approach to be taken when collecting data in a systematic way.

Through constant comparison of new and older data, the sample that was recruited changed depending on what areas of inquiry needed to be examined further. Constant comparison had highlighted different samples that were to be represented in the study and recruiting participants using this strategy is called theoretical sampling.

For theoretical sampling, the 'analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses his [or her] data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges.'¹³ In the present study, there were three sample groups, for each sample there were different inclusion and exclusion criteria. For the first sample, the inclusion criteria was broad, the only requirement was that the participants were English speaking Poles who lived in Luton. The second sample had a tighter inclusion criterion and excluded highly skilled professionals and students and included low skilled workers and parents of young families who were English or Polish speaking and lived in Luton and Dunstable. The third sample was solely post-war Polish migrants who lived in Luton and Dunstable. All one-to-one interviews and mini focus group interviews lasted approximately 1.5 h. Interviews for students and staff took place at the university and for non-students and staff interviews took place at participants' homes.

The study had approval from the University of Bedfordshire Research Ethics Committee.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Recruitment and access

For each sample group, a different recruitment strategy was used to access different segments of the Polish community. For the first sample group, participants were recruited through a poster campaign and networks. The poster campaign was displayed in the busiest part of the University of Bedfordshire's Park Square campus and successfully led to students participating in the study. Chloe Sharp (CS) had made contact with students and staff at the University's annual conference and through informal networks. The Polish Society at the University of Bedfordshire had been contacted and the founder of the group was able to provide access to student networks but unfortunately the Polish Society had ceased. Both student and staff networks carried the message about participation in the study and many people were interested in taking part. The snowballing technique was used where participants who took part in the study were asked to 'suggest others whom they (knew were) in the target group and who could be invited to take part'.^{14,15}

Gaining access to recruit participants for the second sample group was challenging when compared to the first sample group. A number of methods had been used to recruit participants that were unsuccessful: posters at the local Polish deli and shops that sold Polish food; posts on the Luton Polish magazine (*Magazyn Lokalny*) Facebook page; an email in Polish to Polish migrants through Facebook whose networks were attached to local warehouse businesses such as ASOS, Pratt's Bananas and Amazon; approaching Polish migrants in the local area and giving them a leaflet and telling them about

the study in Polish; talking to students at a local English Language School in Polish; distribution of leaflets in Polish at local recruitment agencies and a letter to parents in English and Polish sent through the Polish Saturday Morning School in Luton. The successful routes to access participants were through networks. There were two main networks that were accessed; the first were local community networks through relationships built with the local Polish Church and the adjoining Mother and Toddler group and second, through the Polish translator/interpreter and whispered interpreter's social networks. This network based strategy had also been successfully used by Rugkása and Canvin (2011) in their research in ethnic minority communities in the UK.¹⁶

The relationships with the Polish Church, Polish Saturday Morning School and Mother and Toddler group took many months to build. As will be explained later, the translator/interpreter played a key role in this relationship as the priests and parents at the church did not speak English. To initiate the working relationship with the church, a carefully worded letter was written to request a meeting between the priest, the University of Bedfordshire's Institute for Health Research Director Gurch Randhawa and CS. Unfortunately the priest was unavailable when the meeting was scheduled to occur and the social leaders of the Polish Club, a joint building to the Polish Church, and the Head Teacher of the Polish Saturday Morning School, who organized Children's Masses at the Polish Church, all helped to access the families at the church. It must be noted that there was a change in priests early on in the data collection stage, the priest who was initially contacted and did not attend the meeting left and was replaced by a priest who the translator and CS met. We visited the church many times to meet the priest to ensure he was happy with the research material and to build up a good rapport with the church leaders.

The third sample was post-war Polish migrants and they were recruited through the Polish Church as the *Stowarzyszenie Polskich Kombatantów (SPK)*, a club for ex-servicemen had recently closed down. The translator/interpreter and CS had been invited by the priest to attend the post-war lunch and here the older church members were invited to take part in the study through an announcement in English and Polish. Some of these church members had been previously approached in visits to the Polish Church when attending the Children's Mass.

Two main challenges to recruitment were the use of incentives and withdrawal. For the first and second sample, a £20 voucher for the local Luton shopping center was given. A voucher was not relevant for the older participants and the incentive was adapted. A £20 donation was given toward redecoration costs to help with the maintenance of the church that the post-war migrants had established in the 1940s. Many young families had shown great interest in the study and had provided contact details but withdrew when organizing an interview. The response rate from the older members of the Polish Church was low and a number of potential participants who were approached had declined participation in the study due to the belief that they were too old to donate or felt uncomfortable about being interviewed. The issue of withdrawal was significant as this was high among the post-war migrants and the young families that had attended the

Children's Mass at the church but the Mother and Toddler group members had a higher level of participation in the study.

4.2. Using a translator/interpreter and a whispered interpreter in cross-cultural research

For the purposes of this paper, translation refers to oral and written forms of communication. An interpreter refers to spoken forms of communication that are changed from the source language to the target language and a translator refers to written forms of communication that are changed from the source language to the target language. The main translator has been referred to as the translator/interpreter so far but will now be referred to as the translator.

Brislin (1970) developed a model to show how research interviews can be translated to reduce inconsistencies in cross-cultural research.¹⁷ Brislin purports translation of transcripts to be completed by two separate translators where one translated from the source language to the target language and the other translated from the target language to the source language, these are rated by a number of translators and consistencies are highlighted and dealt with.¹⁷

For the present study, this was not deemed feasible and a different method to translation was used to overcome time and budget restrictions. There was a translator and a whispered interpreter who both were involved in the interviews. The translator had a large role. It has been outlined previously that the translator had helped to recruit participants and build relationships with the key stakeholders in the study. The translator undertook a number of tasks in the study: contacted participants to organize the interview; translated all recruitment material including posters, recruitment forms and ethical information about the study for participants and translated interview materials including the interview guide and diagrams used for the development of the conceptual map. The translator conducted the interviews based on these translated interview materials, transcribed the interviews into Polish and translated these into English and was paid on receipt of the final transcript. The translator played a significant part in the study and the whispered interpreter only attended the interview and repeated the participant's response to me, where CS took notes. The translator was committed to the project and had a high level of professionalism. As it can be seen, the interpreter played an integral role in representing the study, explaining the study, communicating with participants and key stakeholders. However as Temple (2002) highlighted there is little guidance as to how to introduce an interpreter in communication in research.¹⁸

In grounded theory, the aim of the methodology is to build a theory or in the case of the present study, a conceptual map to visually represent findings. Constant comparison of new and old codes led to the development of the interview guide evolving as themes arose. There were core questions that remained constant but there were questions that were included that tested emergent themes. Throughout the interviews, the conceptual map was developed, meaning that constant changes in the interview material led to additional workload for the interpreter before the interview.

This translation strategy used in the study was in line with grounded theory methodology as notes can be used for coding and analysis purposes. After the interview, these notes were discussed in a debriefing meeting with the translator and whispered interpreter to ensure notes were accurate and to discuss discrepancies or cultural specific references. Final translated English transcripts were compared with the notes from the interviews as there were long time delays between the interview and the transcript being received as translation was highly time consuming. Overall, when comparing notes to transcripts, there were no significant differences.

4.3. Using a professional translator

The translator was recruited through the first sample's community network at the University of Bedfordshire. She was a professional translator and the authors addressed gaps in her knowledge specific to the study by providing training in interviewing and information about the aims and scope of the study.

A challenge for researchers doing cross-cultural research is the lack of available professional interpreters and translators in research as the role is not limited to the interview itself but the preparation that leads to the interview and post-interview translation process that was discussed earlier. To overcome this, Polish speaking PhD students may be used to conduct the interviews, but the time-consuming elements of the role may be problematic for PhD students (Ryan L., personal communication, 2011). When discussing the involvement of a PhD student in interpreting and conducting interviews with the professional translator, she stressed the importance of understanding the area of research, the key terms used in the subject area and the degree that messages could be summarized or interpreted. For example, if one is to interpret a fictional book, the general meaning of the book is portrayed but for academic research there must be as little interpretation as possible because the participant's voice must be heard and not the interpreter's. The translation should be detailed, accurate and as close to verbatim and the meaning of the response as possible and this is guided by translation rules that a lay translator may not know. The decision of who to use as the translator is imperative to the trustworthiness and validity of the study.¹⁹

The difficulty of translating oral communication verbatim has been addressed and these examples demonstrate the translation of recorded oral communication that is transformed into written communication in the form of a transcript where the participant's responses as kept as close to verbatim as possible. These examples show the level of detail the translator was able to report the participant's responses and shows the importance of having translated transcripts for analysis.

The question 'What do you think attracts people from Poland to come to live in the UK?' was posed. In an English interview, one participant stated:

'I believe that it's just that um, that the thought that they would be able to earn some money fairly quickly compared to what it is like compared to Poland' (I1)

In a Polish interview, one participant stated:

'I think to myself that actually it is due to the fact that we have an airport here. So, when the first migrants arrived, they went to where it was closest, so they wouldn't have to travel more.' (I9)

In the translated transcripts, the Polish interview was highly detailed and captured as close to verbatim as possible the language that the participant had used to explain their view as opposed to the translator 'interpreting' the data and the researcher analyzing this data secondary. We argue that it is important for transcripts to be translated by a professional translator to uphold the integrity and quality of data and that translation is a skill that a lay translator may not have. In Lopez et al. (2008) study, a lay interpreter was used who had interview experience but did not have translation experience was recruited and for quality assurance an independent translator assessed. They reported that the level of detail provided by the lay interpreter was lower than that of the independent translator, which led to a loss of detailed data.²⁰

4.4. Researcher–participant–translator power dynamic

In qualitative research, it has been argued that there is an unequal relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee.²¹ This power imbalance could lead to the exploitation of the interviewee and highlights the impossibility for fully informed consent.²² Power inequality was a challenge that arose in the study as some of the participants were recruited through the translator and whispered interpreters' community network as they both lived in Luton and had wide social networks. As a result, a researcher–translator power dynamic was felt as the translator and whispered interpreter had easier access to the Polish community as they were 'insiders,' this phenomenon had also been experienced by Murray and Wynne (2001).²³

Recruiting through community networks may have created an interviewer–interviewee power dynamic between the participant and the translator who was conducting the interviews. Although the translator was working in a professional domain, she could be argued to be a 'peer researcher' as she was part of the local Polish community but in the interview context there could be a shift in the power dynamic. The power dynamic was a challenge and to deal with this, CS maintained responsibility and control throughout the recruitment process and in the interviews. CS had used a recruitment form to ensure the participant met the inclusion criteria and CS was present in all interviews and was aware of all aspects being discussed within the interview guide through the whispered interpreter. CS asked additional questions outside of the interview guide to build upon emergent data or to clarify responses.

4.5. Researching sensitive topics: organ donation, death and religion

The study investigated the perceived relationships between deceased organ donation, gift exchange and religion.⁶

Talking about organ donation is linked with discussing one's own death or thinking of a relative dying and can incite highly emotional responses as death is a commonly feared experience.^{24,25} The translator, whispered interpreter and CS could all react to the stories and the feelings of a relative dying as the research team are not solely data collection tools.²⁶ 'Emotional work' can have an impact on the research team. To overcome this, there was a limit on the number of interviews conducted in a week to avoid emotional exhaustion.²¹ The research team had a debriefing meeting after the interviews to enable the translator and whispered interpreter a safe 'space' to discuss their feelings and issues that they had reflected upon as the interviews were confidential as thoughts about the issues discussed in the interview may not necessarily have ceased as soon as the 'stop' button the MP3 recorder had been pressed after the response to the final question.

5. Conclusions

This paper has highlighted the use of a professional translator and a whispered interpreter in cross-cultural research to overcome time and budget constraints. It may be helpful to test different translation strategies, such as Brislin's (1970) model and the strategy used in this paper and to research the use of translators that have different skill sets such as professional translators and lay translators to highlight the benefits and challenges to demonstrate different areas of training that lay or professional translators may need before embarking on the research project.¹⁰

Health and social care research, and specifically organ donation research with a focus on Polish migrants is limited and this is the first study to examine the attitudes toward deceased organ donation from the viewpoint of this community. There were practical challenges to collecting qualitative data such as the organization of focus groups, the time-consuming nature of translating and ethical issues such as power relationships when recruiting an interpreter from within the local community and discussing sensitive topics. This paper illustrated the complexities of conducting qualitative cross-cultural research and the use of professional local translators and interpreters.

This article describes insights and experiences of researching sensitive health topics with the recent and post-war Polish migrant community that could make a valuable contribution toward a better understanding of involving this group in future health research. This is particularly relevant as there is currently little health research available on the Polish migrant community and is an area that could potentially expand as there are key indicators that they are settling in the UK since the expansion of the European Union.

Conflicts of interest

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