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# Distress Protocol for qualitative data collection

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**Distress Protocol 1:** The protocol for managing distress in the context of a research focus group /interview  
(Modified from : Draucker C B, Martsof D S and Poole C (2009) Developing Distress Protocols for research on Sensitive Topics.  
*Archives of Psychiatric Nursing* 23 (5) pp 343-350 )

Distress

- A participant indicates they are experiencing a high level of stress or emotional distress OR
- exhibit behaviours suggestive that the discussion/interview is too stressful such as uncontrolled crying, shaking etc

Stage 1  
Response

- Stop the discussion/interview.
- One of the researchers (who is a health professional) will offer immediate support
- Assess mental status:
  - Tell me what thoughts you are having?
  - Tell me what you are feeling right now?
  - Do you feel you are able to go on about your day?
  - Do you feel safe?

Review

- If participant feels able to carry on;  
resume interview/discussion
- If participant is unable to carry on  
Go to stage 2

Stage 2  
Response

- Remove participant from discussion and accompany to quiet area or discontinue interview
- Encourage the participant to contact their GP or mental health provider OR
- Offer, with participant consent, for a member of the research team to do so OR
- With participant consent contact a member of the health care team treating them at for further advice/support

Follow up

- Follow participant up with courtesy call (if participant consents) OR
- Encourage the participant to call either if he/she experiences increased distress in the hours/days following the focus group

**Distress Protocol 2:** The protocol for managing distress in the context of a research focus group /interview management  
McCosker, H Barnard, A Gerber, R (2001). Undertaking Sensitive Research: Issues and Strategies for Meeting the Safety Needs of All.  
Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 2(1)



### **Distress Protocol 3:** The protocol for managing distress in the context of a research focus group /interview transcription

(Gregory, D Russell, C Phillips, L (1997). *Beyond textual perfection: transcribers as vulnerable persons*. *Qualitative Health Research*, 7(2), 294-300.)

#### Pre-data collection

- The transcriber should be considered in any research proposal, with a clear indication of how this person will be provided with a "safe" working environment while also maintaining the "quality" of the research

#### ethical review stage

- be included in the ethical clearance process
- is informed of the nature of the research and the type of data

#### Pre-transcription

- is alerted prior to the transcription of potentially "challenging" or "difficult" interviews
- has regular scheduled debriefing sessions with a named member of the research team

#### During Transcription

- has prompt access to an appropriate person for crisis counselling
- has a clearly documented termination from the transcription process that includes resolution of personal issues which arose as a consequence of the work
- may be encouraged to journal their thoughts and feelings which may then become part of fieldwork notes in some research approaches

#### Follow up

- Follow transcriber up with courtesy call (if transcriber consents)  
OR
- Encourage the transcriber to call if he/she experiences increased distress in the hours/days following transcription