

A guide to meta-ethnography for occupational therapists

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Introduction: Qualitative meta-syntheses draw together and combine data from multiple studies and can expand insights and knowledge about phenomena such as client experiences. Meta-ethnography is currently the most commonly utilised approach to meta-synthesis in occupational therapy. In order to realise the potential of meta-syntheses it is important that the occupational therapy community has the skills to interpret and appraise published syntheses in order to integrate findings into clinical practice.

Objectives: This paper aims to present a review of journal papers that evaluate or critique meta-ethnography as a research method and/or offer reflections on conducting a meta-ethnography or guidance on conducting a meta-ethnography.

Method: A systematic review of meta-ethnography methodology publications from 1986-2016 was conducted. Ten relevant papers and one key text were identified. Two authors independently extracted data from the relevant sources.

Results: Seven stages of meta-ethnography are described including: starting the meta-synthesis, consideration of relevant studies, reading the relevant studies and deciding on how they should be put together, translating the studies into one another, synthesising these translations and expressing the synthesis for the target audience. Key advancements from subsequently published journal papers are integrated into the presentation of the seven stages.

Conclusion: Methods for synthesising the results of quantitative research are well developed, for example systematic review and meta-analysis. There is growing interest in methods of synthesising qualitative research. Given the proliferation of qualitative methods in occupational therapy research it is imperative that therapists have a sound understanding of methods for synthesising qualitative research.