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Development and proposal of a reference tool for semi-structured interviews for the characterization of the management in mental health networks

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Abstract

In 2011, Brazil's mental health care networks were instituted; nevertheless, standardized arrangements or indicators for network evaluation and management were not established. Hence, a proposed model to evaluate municipal and regional management of such networks was elaborated. One of its steps consists of semi-structured interviews aiming the network management knowledge. Therefore, this paper aimed the development and validation of a reference tool for conducting interviews focusing on assessment of mental health care network management. Methods comprised definition of interest topics, questions elaboration for each topic, preliminary script preparation, script validation, script adequacy and definition of final script. Thus, the developed script consisted of 29 questions and 8 follow-up questions divided over 8 topics (interviewee characterization, legislation, decision-making processes, network structure, management participants, information systems, indicators, and knowledge of external experiences). The script also added individualized field reports and interview planning and execution guidelines. After validation, it was concluded that chosen topics were relevant and appropriate, despite minor modifications; and estimated average interview time remained close to prior established. Therefore, the developed tool can assist collecting information to help managers evaluate the network and improving population health. Moreover, the tool could be used in other localities or adapted for other networks.

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1. Introduction

The Unified Health System (*Sistema Único de Saúde*; SUS) was created in Brazil in 1988 and it is considered one of the most dynamic and complex public health system in the world¹. Given that regionalization is one of the basic principles adopted since the system's creation, the implementation of health care networks in the SUS has been recently intensified^{2,3}. The Psychosocial Care Network (*Rede de Atenção Psicossocial*; RAPS), created in 2011, is essential to the SUS because it aims to attend people with distress or mental disorder and with needs arose from the use of crack, alcohol and other drugs⁴.

However, the Brazilian legislations do not establish standardized arrangements or indicators for the evaluation and management of RAPS^{4,5}. This is because most of the existing pacts are only for funding or implementing some of the RAPS' services⁵.

Therefore, a research was proposed with the aim of introducing an evaluation model of municipal and regional management of a RAPS. The research considers the viewpoint of the professionals responsible for municipal and regional network management, the legislation, the information systems in use, and the indicators identified in the literature and/or used in network management⁵.

One of the first steps is to conduct semi-structured interviews with professionals of the municipal and regional management of RAPS aiming to validate their understanding of the network and to identify the processes used in the management of a mental health care network.

Therefore, the goal of this paper is the development and validation of a reference tool for conducting interviews that focuses on the assessment of management in a mental health care network.

In the next section, we will present a background on interpretative research and semi-structured interviews. Then, in the third section, we will describe the methods defined for the elaboration and validation of the reference tool. In the fourth section, we will describe the resulted tool, how the validation process occurred and also discuss the obtained results. At last, in the fifth section, we will be making a brief description of the importance of this work and how it could be used for the management evaluation of any RAPS.

2. Background

The qualitative research field seek to comprehend and to explain social phenomenon and can be applied in different fields and disciplines⁶. In the health sector, the use of qualitative studies is increasing, partially due the difficulty of traditional epidemiological approaches to incorporate the growing impact of health determinants in the population and to portray certain clinical problems^{7,8,9}. Moreover, it is also noticed the use of qualitative studies in information systems fields, in particular the interpretative ones that shed light on how an information system influences and is influenced by the environment, which allows understanding their development and management⁶.

Research can be divided in categories (or paradigms)⁶ according with the researcher's perspective regarding the reality of what she or he wants to research. However, the description and the distinctions between each of these categories are not always very clear¹⁰, which may result in a same study incorporating features of multiple categories⁶. Taking this into account, one of the most used classification consists of three categories: positivism, interpretative and critical^{11,12}, but, in this context, it is necessary to emphasize that the definition of interpretive research cannot be considered as synonym of qualitative research, but rather one of its specific types^{6,11}.

Therefore, interpretative research is suitable in studies that attempt to understand people's thoughts and actions in social and work ambiance¹¹ and phenomena through the significance attributed by the person (or people) as situations happen¹¹. Furthermore, it is philosophically based on the concepts of the search for human understanding, life experiences and the ways which each individual knows himself and assimilates the world⁷.

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