**Glossary of Qualitative Research Terms**

**Coding:** Coding is the basis of data analysis in qualitative research. Coding begins when the researcher receives data and is an ongoing process. Coding ends when no new information is discovered despite additional data collection and when connections between categories are solidified.19

Open coding consists of reviewing transcripts of interviews and highlighting words, phrases, sentences, or even paragraphs that hold meaning and/or that occur repeatedly. Writing notes in the margins of interview transcripts is another way that qualitative researchers may code transcripts. Open coding entails breaking data down into smaller bits for further analysis.19

Axial coding involves identifying the bits of data that can be grouped together. The data that researchers have broken down is then reassembled into broader categories and subcategories.19

Selective coding entails identifying major themes or a broad category and relating all the other codes and categories back to these themes.19 The small pieces of data obtained from a variety of sources (participant interviews) are then reassembled into a meaningful whole to create a “big picture”-often in the form of a theoretical framework-- of the phenomenon the researcher is studying.

**Constant comparison:** Constant comparison is a critical component of data analysis, particularly in grounded theory approaches. Data that has been broken down into small pieces, such as words, phrases, or sentences, is compared to other data collected to determine the similarities and differences and to begin to group them into categories that could ultimately evolve into a theoretical framework.25

**Grounded theory:** Grounded theory is one method of qualitative research that aims to generate a theory about human behavior. Data collection and data analysis take place concurrently and the focus of the research emerges as additional data analysis takes place. The final product of true grounded theory work is typically a theoretical framework.25

**Memoing:** In the context of qualitative research, memoing is the process of recording observations, thoughts, or questions for future exploration. Memoing takes place throughout the data collection and analysis process and assists in the creation of a theory or framework.19

**Purposive or purposeful sampling:** Using qualitative methods, researchers gain rich data for analysis by intentionally selecting participants who fit particular criteria. Researchers choose participants for interviews based on their experiences and insight into the topic being studied.19

**Qualitative descriptive research approach:** The qualitative descriptive approach, unlike phenomenology or grounded theory, does not involve generation of theory or full explanation of a phenomenon. Instead, qualitative descriptive research evaluates phenomena in the natural state and makes observations about human behavior without aiming to build theory surrounding why such behavior occurs. Therefore, qualitative descriptive researchers are not bound to following a particular theory or pre-established framework.17

**Snowball sampling:** Snowball sampling (also called chain referral sampling) takes place when a researcher asks one research participant to suggest other individuals who might have similar experiences related to the phenomenon under investigation. This method can be useful in situations where the researcher has difficulty identifying participants, where they are not easily reached, or where individuals might prefer to remain anonymous.19

**Strategies Used Establish Scientific Rigor (Trustworthiness) in Qualitative Research**

**Confirmability:** Holloway and Wheeler19 and Munhall25 compared confirmability to objectivity or neutrality. The researcher must ensure that study findings are not merely the result of his or her own opinions, assumptions, or preconceived ideas.

**Credibility:** Research participants recognize their unique situation and that the “truth” applies to them in their own context.19

**Dependability:** Dependability in qualitative research corresponds to consistency and reliability in quantitative research.19,25 A detailed description of the research process and the use of an audit trail help future researchers who might wish to reproduce a study.19

**Member Checking:** Member checking is when a researcher summarizes or paraphrases what participants have said in order to ensure accurate understanding and then repeats it to them for confirmation.19

**Peer Review:** A peer review enables a researcher to minimize bias that could have influenced the qualitative research process. When peer reviewers identify similar themes in the coding process, their findings confirm the researcher’s analysis.19

**Researcher Reflexivity:** Reflexivity is the process of examining both oneself as a researcher and the research relationship. Reflecting on the research relationship involves examining one's relationship to the participants and how the relationship dynamics affect responses to questions.19

**Transferability:** Transferability represents the equivalent of generalizability or external validity in quantitative research,19,25 meaning that the findings in a qualitative research study can apply to individuals in similar situations.