

Investigating trauma: Methodological, emotional, and ethical challenges for the qualitative researcher

A proposal for a Special themed issue of *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*

Megane Miralles, Marc Stierand, Viktor Dörfler and Bill Lee

This proposed special issue intends to address the methodological, ethical and emotional challenges for the qualitative researcher when researching trauma. Trauma occurs when a person's coping mechanisms are overwhelmed (see Van der Kolk, 1998, Young, 1995). Traumas frequently occur in extreme contexts such as natural disasters, wars, and illegal transport of migrants, but may also be found in more everyday contexts like hospitals and social housing, such as the Grenfell Tower fire in the UK in 2017. The current pandemic outbreak of Covid-19 is a striking example of an extreme context which can lead to trauma.

Most literature about trauma can be found in the fields of psychology and medicine where the importance of reflecting on methodological, ethical and emotional challenges when conducting trauma research is highlighted. The field of management and organization studies is largely missing such reflexive accounts of researchers. Such accounts are essential for a better understanding of the phenomenon of trauma for organizations and management in general and are necessary for an increased awareness of the challenges for organization and management researchers. While some research acknowledges that trauma scholars need to be able to deal with participants' vulnerability, there is very little research conducted that considers the emotional effects on the researcher (Stoler, 2002, Campbell, 2013). Conducting research in extreme and traumatic contexts is challenging as it deals with stressful and potentially shocking experiences of injustices and suffering that can create feelings of guilt and exhaustion in the researcher (Morse and Field, 1995, Dickson-Swift et al., 2007). Even studying secondary traumatic accounts in documents without direct contact with those who had experienced the traumas, can result in "sleeping disorders, emotional changes and a need for social support" (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007).

The purpose of this special issue is to collect (self-)critical accounts of organization and management researchers based on their various methodological, emotional, and ethical experiences in studying trauma. We are interested in how researching trauma – whether intentional at the outset of the research process or emergent during the research endeavour – may impact the qualitative researcher and the research process. The intention is to bring together a collection of thought-provoking papers that can help to further develop our understanding to improve trauma research practice in organization and management studies.

An indicative list of topics for empirical and conceptual papers for this special issue includes:

- The emotional experience of researching trauma;
- Ethical challenges and regulation of trauma research;
- Factors affecting the social construction of official responses to trauma and their contents;
- The impact of collective memory, its absence and cultural norms and values on the research of trauma;
- The implications of Covid-19 and/ or other disease outbreak research for the qualitative researcher;
- Usefulness or otherwise of documents produced by official investigations to trauma in organizations;
- Autoethnographic or insider accounts of research into specific traumas, including reflections of a researcher's prior experience on their understanding of trauma;
- Reflective essays on ownership of trauma(s) and any rights of the researcher;
- Considerations of whether academic accounts contribute to closure and development of understanding around trauma;
- Experiential learning through researching trauma;
- Transferability of concepts from other disciplines for studying trauma in organisations and management;
- Intersectional perspective (e.g. effects of gender, race and class) on trauma and on researching trauma;
- Researcher's response to unexpected trauma when conducting qualitative research;
- Resilience or other responses to trauma;
- Challenges of researching the wider impacts of trauma.

Submission information:

Submission deadline: nine months from the advertisement of the special issue for initial submission.

Review process: six months for the first round of review, then four months for the second round of review and a further three months for an intended publication date.

The submission of a full paper should be between 7,000 and 10,000 words.

Submission of shorter reflexive accounts of particular challenges when conducting trauma research is also encouraged. The submission of a shorter account should be between 3,000 and 5,000 words.

Standard processes of the journal will be observed.

Proposed Special Issue Guest Editors and Contact Information:

Megane Miralles, École hôtelière de Lausanne, HES-SO University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland, Switzerland (primary contact)

Email address: megane.miralles@ehl.ch

Marc Benjamin Stierand, École hôtelière de Lausanne, HES-SO University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland, Switzerland
Email address: marc.stierand@ehl.ch

Viktor Dörfler, Management Science Department, University of Strathclyde Business School, Glasgow, UK
Email address: viktor.dorfler@strath.ac.uk

Bill Lee, Management School, Sheffield University, UK
Email address: w.j.lee@sheffield.ac.uk

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