Researching family in the context of health: challenges for the researcher

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Family focused research presents unique methodological, ethical and practical challenges. Even though the family is widely acknowledged as an important source of support for its members when they are ill very little research actually explores the family as a single unit. Researchers undertaking family focused research have to address a range of issues. The definition of the family group must to be clearly defined. It is also important for the researcher to use a framework that captures the unique nature of the family (Greenstein, 2006). A family perspective; the views of many people is very different from the individual perspective and this needs to be recognised and reflected in the theoretical framework (Friedman, Bowden, & Jones, 2003). It is important to identify what the whole family is experiencing; how the family is responding to and resources they draw on to overcome adversity (McCubbin, Thompson, Thompson, & Fromer, 1998). Family research presents significant ethical issues too. These include age of participants and the potential of one family member’s responses to adversely affect other family members. This paper reflects the research issues associated with undertaking an exploratory descriptive study addressing the resources and support young women with breast cancer and their family member’s utilise. Exploring the family within the context of the health care setting is important however very challenging in regards to the methodological, ethical and practical decisions to be made.

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