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An exploration of a narrative approach in the evaluation of smoking cessation programs for disadvantaged populations

K Mikhailovich, P Morrison

University of Canberra, Canberra, ACT, Australia

Narrative evaluation is increasingly being promoted as a valuable adjunct to quantitative approaches to evaluation and this paper will outline the challenges and benefits found in the application of this method. The paper discusses the value of a mixed methodology approach and focuses in particular on the use of a narrative evaluation as a method used in group interviews with three groups of people who had participated in smoking cessation programs, including people living with mental health problems, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people with drug and alcohol dependencies.

The narrative approach encouraged participants to tell their stories about their experience of smoking cessation and the meaning they attributed to this experience. Three essential stages to this process involved a telling, a re-telling (by the outsider witness group) and a reflection by the storyteller in which new ideas and insights emerge. Within this framework there was an emphasis on identifying narratives of change that could then be embedded into a broader narrative focused on the aims of the evaluation. This was to examine the role of nicotine replacement therapy in smoking cessation programs for disadvantaged adult populations and identify strategies and factors that support behaviour change and program success.