Abstract Submission Best Practices
Empirical Abstracts

International Neuroethics Society
Updated May 2021

General

Do:

- Describe why your research is relevant to *ethics* and not just neuroscience.
- Use short, direct sentences and active verb tense.
- Break your abstract up into sections.
    - Use paragraphs to break up different parts of the abstract.
    - If you want, you can also use formal headers like background, methods, results, etc.
    - The following sections are an example of types of paragraphs/sections often included.

Don't:

- Use run-on sentences and passive verb tense.
- Write one 400-word paragraph.
    - Breaking up the sections will make your abstract easier to read.

Introduction/Background

Do:

- Briefly review prior literature in this area.
    - Are there similar studies in the literature? What were their findings?
    - Is there any consensus or agreement on the topic?
    - This section should show that your work accounts for and is motivated by the relevant and prominent work in this area.
- Connect prior research to your work.
    - How do the results of existing studies impact your project?
    - Are you offering a new approach that hasn't been tried before?
    - How is your approach different from what has already been published?
- State clearly your hypothesis, thesis, or main argument.
    - This should be one sentence that captures the main idea of your project.
    - Describe what you are trying to accomplish with your research.
    - Hint at what your results will show or demonstrate, if possible.
- Cite background material.
    - Most of your allowed 5 citations should be in this section.

Don't:

- Spend the entire abstract on background research.

- - This section shouldn't be so long that it overshadows your original contribution to the literature.
  - Oversell how your research is doing something no one else has tried before.
    - Be charitable to the existing work in this area. Chances are some credit is due to work that has come before you. Acknowledge this, and then move on to how your project builds on existing work.
  - Wait till later in the abstract to clearly let reviewers know what your project is about.
    - The last sentence of this section should let reviewers know what they are to expect for the rest of the abstract.

Example Introduction/Background Section:

Background: Numerous research trials of deep brain stimulation (DBS) for treatment-resistant depression (TRD) have been conducted. While the efficacy and safety of DBS continues to be investigated, with mixed results, studies examining patient and family lived experiences remain absent. Concerns have been voiced about the potential for DBS to create changes in patients' personality and personal identity (1, 2); however, others suggest this is the intention of psychiatric DBS (3). Qualitative studies with patients who have undergone DBS for other clinical indications have revealed important insights into how the intervention impacts patients' perceptions of themselves, their bodies and relationships (4, 5). These complex and highly nuanced psychosocial experiences are not captured by psychopathology and functional scales used in clinical trials, but can have substantial implications for patient and caregiver wellbeing. Therefore, the aim of this study was to qualitatively examine how DBS for TRD impacts patient personality, self and relationships, from the perspective of both patients and caregivers as they prepare and adjust to life with DBS.

Methods

Do
- Briefly describe the way you conducted your research and generated results.
  - What research did you actually do during the study?
  - Is it a literature review, meta-analysis, survey, interview, focus group, policy analysis, etc?
  - Is this an established technique of generating results? Or is this a new technique?
  - Did you modify an existing strategy? How?
  - This section should be only about 2-3 sentences.

Don't
- Use overly technical jargon or terminology.
  - Describe what you did in plain language. Your abstract should be easy to understand by someone not in your field.
  - It is fine to mention your research strategy (e.g. Grounded Theory, Linear Regression, Cost-Benefit Analysis, etc) but briefly explain what this means for those who are unfamiliar.

Example Methods Section:

Methods: A prospective qualitative design was used. Participants were six patients and five caregivers (spouses, family). Patients were enrolled in a clinical trial of DBS of the bed nucleus of the stria terminalis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants before DBS-implantation and 9-months after stimulation initiation. The 21 interviews were thematically analysed.

Results

Do
- Summarize your key findings clearly.
  - What did your research find?
  - Were the results different based on factors you controlled for in the study?
- Highlight surprising or novel findings.
  - Were there results that go against what you found in the literature?
  - Are there results that are particularly relevant to the ethical issues in this area?

Don't
- Mention every result of your research.
  - Abstracts have limited word counts. You won't have space to share every interesting result of your research.
- Cherry pick your data.
  - Avoid picking only the results most favorable to your hypothesis / argument.
  - If there is data that goes against your argument, share this. You can always account for it later in the conclusion.

Example Results Section:

Results: Three primary themes identified during analysis were: (a) impact of mental illness and treatment on self-concept; (b) device embodiment, and (c) relationships and connection. Severe refractory depression had profoundly impacted who patients were, how they viewed themselves, and the quality and functioning of their relationships. Patients who benefited from DBS felt reconnected with their pre-morbid self, yet still far from their ideal self. Caregivers reported familiar elements of their loved-one re-emerging, but noted a persistence of qualities established during mental illness. While reductions in depression were broadly beneficial for relationships, the process of adjusting relationship dynamics created new challenges. All patients reported recharging difficulties and challenges adapting to the device.

Conclusion

Do
- Mention the **significance** of your findings for this area of research or the field.
  - Do your results change anything about the way we understand a concept or approach an activity?

- ○ How are your results similar or different to what was found in the past?
    - ○ How do your results impact ethical/legal/social considerations in this area?
- ● Describe the limitations of your work.
    - ○ If there were results that go against your main argument, this is the time to mention how you are accounting for that data.
    - ○ Were there reasons you think this data differed from what you expected or other results?
- ● Describe how future work can build upon this work.
    - ○ Are there any next steps? What are they and why are they important?
    - ○ How can these results be used in the future?

Don't
- ● Forget to include a conclusion.
    - ○ It is tempting to present your results and be done with the abstract, but it is helpful to include a few sentences saying why your results are important.

Example Conclusion:

Conclusions: Therapeutic response to DBS is a gradual and complex process that involves an evolving self-concept, adjusting relationship dynamics, and growing connection between body and device. This is the first qualitative study to provide in-depth insight into the lived experience of DBS for TRD. Narrative accounts should routinely be collected as they capture needs and priorities that can guide patient-centred approaches to DBS clinical interventions.