Institut des humanités en médecine

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SAVE THE DATE!

Reflexivity Symposium

Reflexivity in Research with Vulnerable Populations in Health Contexts

7-8 December 2026

Centre Hospitalier Universitaire Vaudois (CHUV)
Lausanne, Switzerland

4 Plenaries

4 Workshops

1 Roundtable

1 Social event

1st edition of an interdisciplinary symposium exploring **reflexivity in sensitive field-based research**

Join researchers from diverse disciplines to discuss ethical challenges, emotional experiences, methodological rigor, and researcher well-being!

Presentation

Reflexivity in research is the ongoing process of critically examining how our position, experiences, assumptions, emotions, and interactions shape the research process and the knowledge we produce. Although reflexivity is widely recognised as an essential part of rigorous research, it is not always integrated into everyday research practices, training, or scientific publications. Reflexive work often remains invisible or is treated as secondary, despite its importance for ethical research, data interpretation, methodological rigor, and researcher well-being.

This symposium explores reflexivity in field-based research, with a particular focus on research involving vulnerable populations, emotionally demanding situations, and ethically sensitive topics. The symposium will explore questions such as:

How is reflexivity put into practice during fieldwork and analysis?
How do researchers navigate ethical, relational, and emotional challenges?
How can reflexivity strengthen methodological rigor and research quality?
What individual, collective, and institutional spaces support reflexive practice?
How can reflexive work be made more visible and shared?

These questions are especially relevant to research in healthcare and with vulnerable populations, including end-of-life care, mental health, migration, ageing, dementia care, and precarious social situations. In such contexts, researchers may encounter suffering, moral tensions, and emotionally demanding interactions. The symposium will also open broader discussions around research ethics, researcher vulnerability, and the conditions under which sensitive research is conducted. The symposium aims to make this work more visible and to create a space for interdisciplinary exchange, collective reflection, and practical discussion.

What do we hope to achieve?

- Strengthen reflexivity as an explicit part of rigorous and ethically grounded research
- Make reflexive work visible as an essential component of scientific practice
- Foster interdisciplinary dialogue across sociology, anthropology, healthcare research, psychology, nursing science, and related fields
- Support early-career researchers through practical workshops, peer exchange, and discussions of real-life challenges encountered during fieldwork
- Encourage collective and institutional approaches to reflexive practice

Who is it for?

The symposium is open to an interdisciplinary audience of researchers and clinicians, with a particular focus on PhD students and early-career researchers.

Because the event aims to encourage meaningful exchange, open discussion, and shared reflection, it will be held **in person only**

7th December

Plenaries

Beyond virtue: Reflexivity as Practice

Dr. Emilie Whitaker
(University of Salford, UK)

This talk explores reflexivity as a disciplined, multi-layered practice that shapes how researchers see, interpret, and write. Drawing on the book, Reflexivity in Social Research, it argues against treating reflexivity as a moral stance or identity. Instead, reflexivity is an ongoing, essential and practical mode of attentiveness embedded in the everyday labour of inquiry. Drawing upon real-world tales from the field, we will explore how training, fieldwork, and writing continually reshape understandings of what counts as data, how knowledge is produced, and the conditions for seeing differently. It concludes by suggesting ways to embed reflexivity as a habit of sustained, situated awareness for all researchers.

Autoethnography as a means of increasing reflexivity in research and healthcare practice

Prof. Christopher Mathieu
(Lund University, Sweden)

Autoethnography is increasingly used by researchers and practitioners as a tool to increase individual and group reflexivity. Autoethnography can be practiced in many ways: individually or in groups, through writing or oral activities, within or across specific settings. Autoethnography affords an opportunity to attain deep reflexivity through structured processes of analysing the interaction between oneself and the context(s) one is part of. This talk discusses the various traditions and forms of autoethnography and the virtues and challenges of these different autoethnographic practices as means to increased reflexivity. Reflexivity is here defined as greater awareness and understanding of one's ways of thinking and acting in contextual situations; challenging the taken-for-granted; exploring what is not thought or done; and what alternatives may exist to current thought and action.

Workshops

Top Chrono: Engaging in Reflexivity Before the Curtain Rises

Simon Lemyre (PhD candidate)
(Université de Montréal, Canada)

Reflexivity becomes particularly challenging when time is running short, mental workload increases and methodological as well as conceptual choices must be made. This workshop will present the experience the author, a Ph.D. candidate from Montreal, conducting partnership-based and intersectoral research on medical assistance in dying (MAiD). The study aims to identify the effects of a documentary theatre play on MAiD on the spectators' moral reasoning, attitude, knowledge, openness to dialogue, and ethical reflection. Time constraints have posed a significant challenge in developing the study's conceptual framework. The author had one year to develop a mixed-method research protocol while simultaneously meeting the requirements of his doctoral program. The workshop will hence reflect on these tensions and their impact on the quality of the research while discussing whether, and how, reflexivity can be sustained within time constraints.

Wearing multiple hats: reflexivity at the intersection of healthcare practice and research

Prof. Settiomio Monteverde
(Bern University of Applied Sciences, Switzerland)
Prof. Anca-Cristina Sterie
(Université de Lausanne, Switzerland)

Healthcare professionals engaging in research navigate multiple roles: clinician, researcher, colleague, recruitment coordinator, and insider to the setting. These overlapping positions offer valuable situated knowledge and facilitate access, but they also create tensions around assumptions, relationships and responsibilities. This workshop explores reflexivity in relation to these multiple professional and research identities. It considers the perspective of healthcare professionals conducting research and that of researchers collaborating with clinician-researchers. Attention will be given to how differences in research expertise, clinical expertise, situational knowledge, available time, and institutional roles shape collaboration, data generation, interpretation, and synthesis in the pursuit of robust knowledge. It will explore how reflexivity can help make different forms of expertise visible, navigate the ethical dilemmas that accompany them, and support respectful partnerships among between participants, clinicians, and researchers.

8th December

Plenaries

'More is not always better' - The complex relationship between reflexivity and mental health

Prof. Katarina Karcher
(University of Birmingham, UK)

Findings from collaborative research with Joanne McCuaig and Sophie King-Hill on reflexivity and researcher wellbeing will be presented. There is ample research that reflexivity can have a positive impact on research and researcher wellbeing. Yet, as I show, there are research contexts in which the pressure to perform and display reflexivity can have a detrimental effect.

Ethical reflexivity in healthcare research settings

Prof. Anca-Cristina Sterie
(Université de Lausanne, Switzerland)

Research in healthcare settings often raises important ethical questions. Some of these can be anticipated, allowing researchers to establish procedures for addressing them (what is commonly referred to as procedural ethics). However, during the research process, unexpected situations and challenges may give rise to what have been described as “ethically important moments” within ethics in practice. This plenary explores ethical reflexivity as a way of recognizing, examining, and responding to such moments as they emerge. Drawing on concrete examples from healthcare settings, it will examine how researchers’ positioning, relationships and decisions shape the ethical dimensions of research, and argue for ethical reflexivity as an ongoing practice that complements procedural ethics.

Workshops

Am I an observer, a confessor, or else? Researchers roles in end-of-life caring networks

Iris Parra Jounou (Postdoc researcher)
(Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain)

If end-of-life care is relational, then end-of-life researchers become members of caring networks. This statement derives from a study that we conducted with patients requesting assisted suicide in Spain, in which we interviewed 15 different people who wanted to die to understand their situation, decision, and experience throughout the process. Of course, when preparing such a research, the first question that comes to mind is ethical. Is it justified? Is it good for them? Are we going to interfere in their decision? All these questions consider the wellbeing of the people that we want to interview. Less do we reflect on how the research can affect us, as researchers at different levels. This is particularly important when doing qualitative research in very moving, sensitive topics, such as death and dying. Researchers doing research on end-of-life topics are part of caring networks, in which they interact in relationships in which they can affect and be affected by others. From this standpoint, researchers can explore their own vulnerability, share difficulties encountered throughout the research, as well as build some caring mechanisms not only directed at the people they are working with, but also at the research team itself.

Contributing to social and political debates through quantitative research: The importance of reflexivity and related challenges

Prof. Isabelle Marcoux
(University of Ottawa, Canada)

Although it is rarely addressed in quantitative research, reflexivity remains essential. The fact that it is based on the hypothetical-deductive approach does not automatically protect it from potential biases. For example, the choice of research topic is rarely neutral, and research questions can sometimes stem from government priorities or from field challenges, which are themselves influenced by their own agendas. Researchers bear a scientific and social responsibility for the careful interpretation, dissemination, and potential reuse of their findings. Examples drawn from studies on medical assistance in dying in Quebec will serve as the basis for the discussions

8th December

Roundtable

Practicing reflexivity about the use of AI in research: what questions and practices

The increasing use of generative artificial intelligence in research raises important questions about what researchers delegate to it, how this may shape interpretation and knowledge production, and where responsibility for research decisions ultimately lies. This roundtable will address the boundaries of this practice and the resources that can support epistemic reflexivity when working with generative artificial intelligence.

Registration

Limited seats available – Register early!

This event is free of charge (meals and accomodation are not included).

Registration deadline: 1st of November, 2026

Participants may attend one workshop per half-day. They can indicate their preferences when registering. Workshop allocation is subject to availability.

Inscriptions

Register by scanning the QR code or clicking on the Google Drive link!

https://forms.gle/CUc7DAsJ5wKEjoBY9

Organizers

Service de soins palliatifs et de support, CHUV.

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Clara Acien, PhD candidate

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