

Benefits of a therapeutic horseback riding program to veterans suffering from PTSD or traumatic brain injury

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INTRODUCTION:

Frequently, veterans return from combat and suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and/or a traumatic brain injury. These disorders result in symptoms that prevent veterans from a normal life post-combat. One potential complementary intervention is Therapeutic Horseback Riding (THR).

RESEARCH QUESTION:

- What are the veterans' perceptions of a 6-week THR program?

HYPOTHESIS:

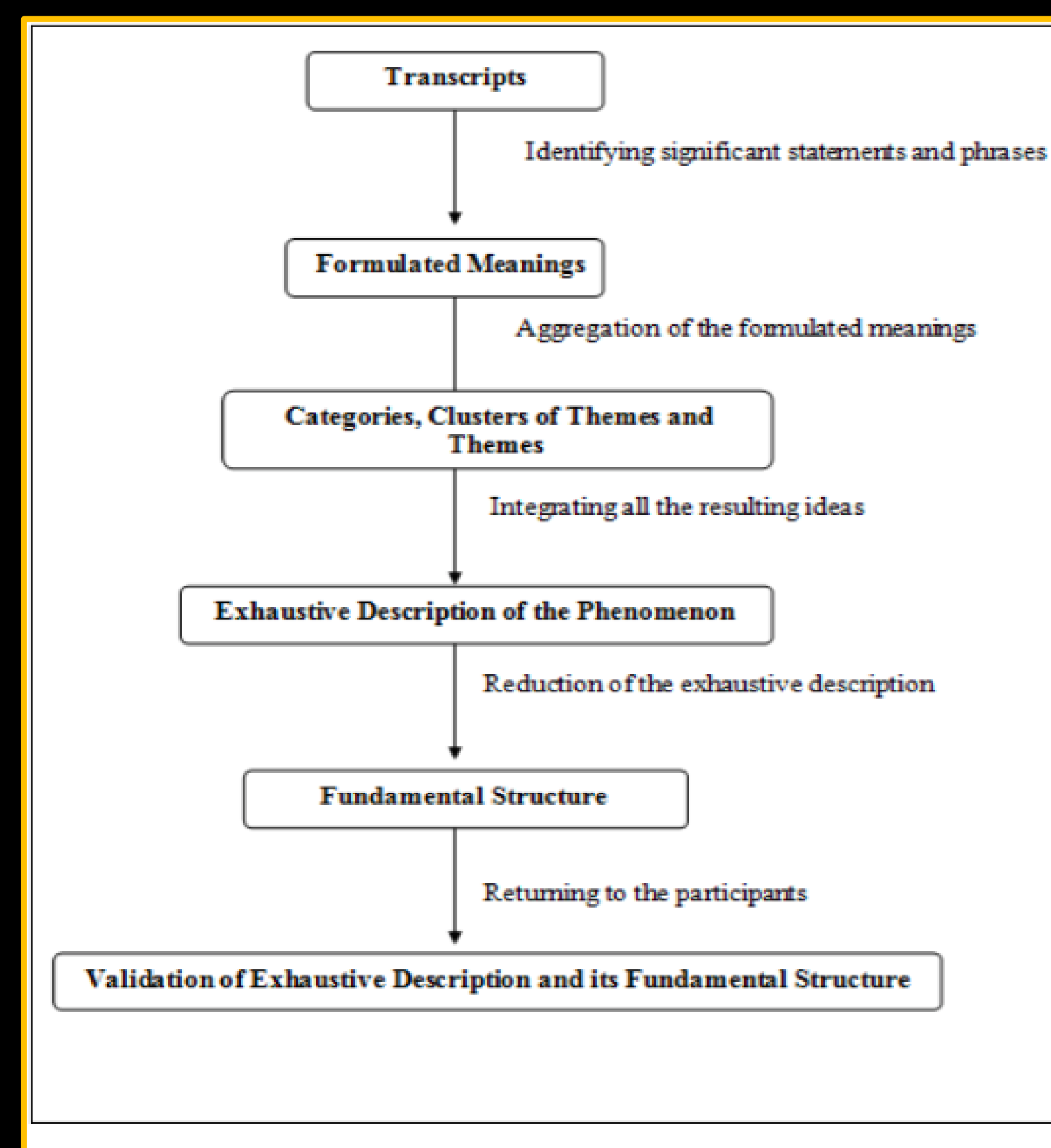
- Veterans will find a sense of psychological well-being, healthy interaction and emotional connections.

RESEARCH METHODS:

- Collaboration with Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship (PATH) accredited THR centers
- Randomized controlled trial consisting of a Riding Group and wait-list Control Group
- A one hour weekly intervention for 6 weeks
- Each veteran matched with a horse suitable for them
- Each session built upon skill sets learned in previous sessions
- Participants were given a riding diary to write in
 - Included in these were: date of the riding session, name of horse and comments about the session
 - Completed after each session
 - These allowed the veterans to freely describe emotions and ways THR did or didn't help them
 - Using Colaizzi's method, a qualitative analysis was performed on the riding diary data



COLAIZZI'S METHOD:



PARTICIPANT COMMENTS:

- "I looked into her eyes, I felt like she understood and empathized with me."
- "Reborn!! So alive— almost like horse-yoga."
- "Latte is sort of a part of me while we ride."
- "Last night, I watched Full Metal Jacket and therefore had terrible nightmares. The ride today was good stress relief."
- "Working with the horse for this hour puts things in perspective and is very calming."

ANTICIPATED THEMES:

- Analysis still in progress
- Anticipated themes include: bonding with the horse, a sense of control, a calming or relaxing feeling, and wishing for a longer program



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U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs, National Center for PTSD [Internet]. PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 (PCL-5). Available from: <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/assessment/adult-sr/ptsd-checklist.asp>