



Women with an eating disorder: Exploring how physical activity is perceived



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Introduction

It is well documented that physical activity (PA) promotes physical and psychosocial well-being for an array of populations. Indeed, researchers have reported that PA is an important factor in the prevention and treatment of a host of physical and mental illnesses such as eating disorders (Achamrah et al., 2016; Hausenblas et al., 2008).

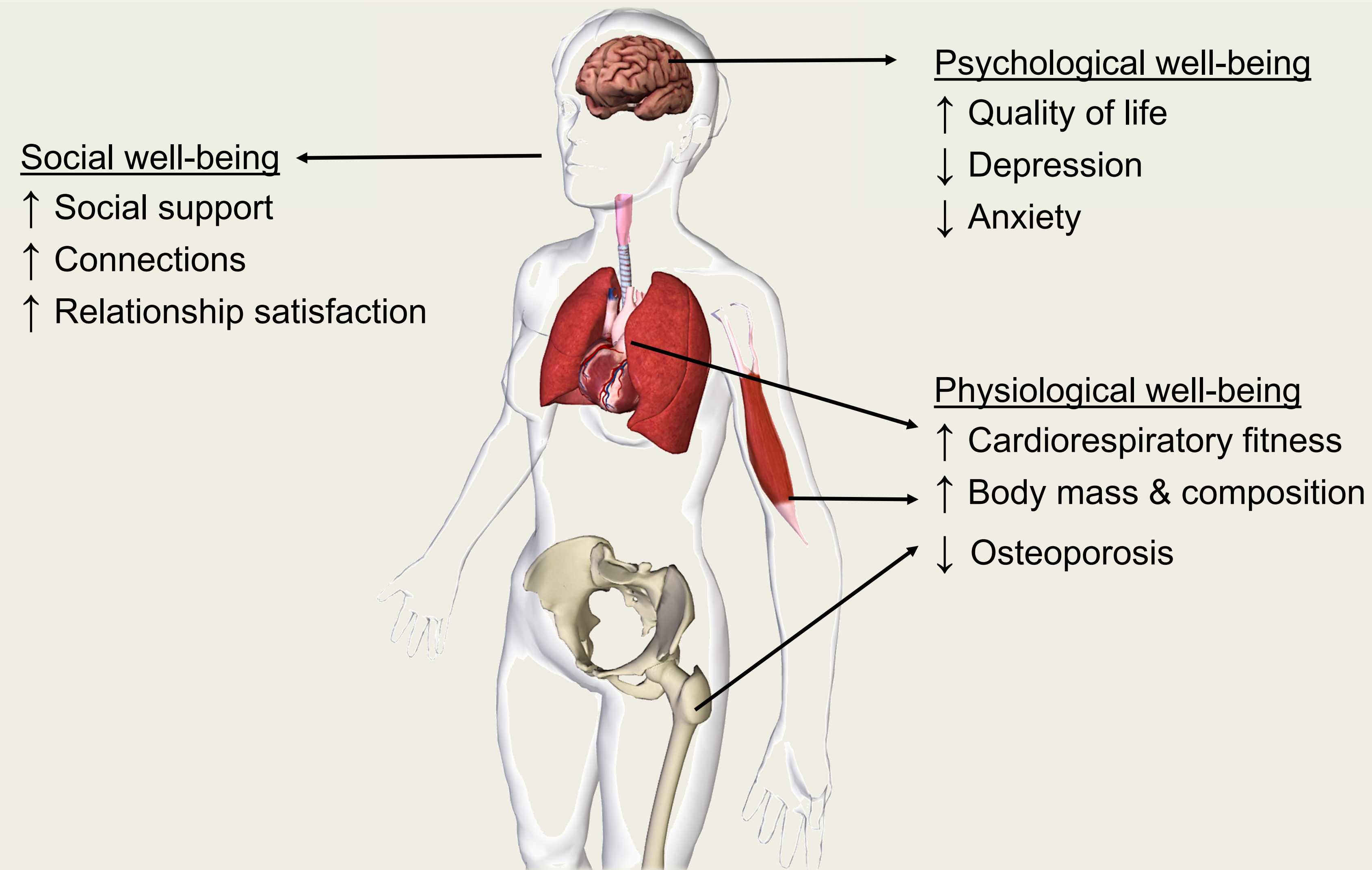
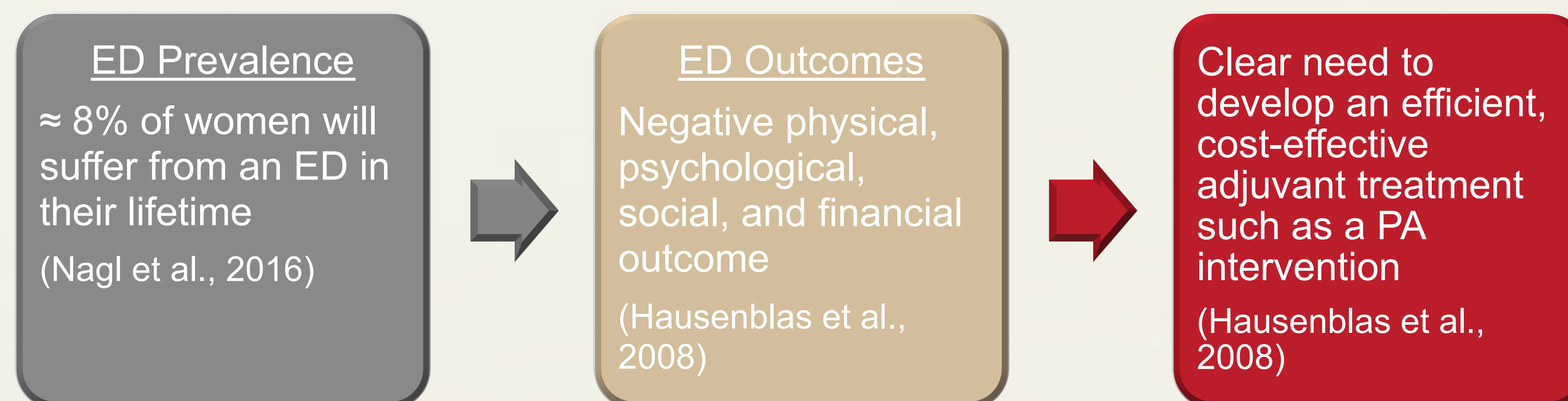


Figure 1. Potential benefits of PA for individuals living with an eating disorder (Achamrah et al., 2016; Hausenblas et al., 2008).

According to the American Psychiatric Association (APA, 2000), the four main clinical eating disorders include:

1. Anorexia nervosa;
2. Bulimia nervosa;
3. Binge-eating disorder;
4. Eating disorder not otherwise specified (ED NOS).



Note. ED = eating disorder.

State of knowledge

Healthcare providers seldom promote PA for individuals living with an eating disorder for fear that it may lead to unhealthy obsessive behaviours (Moola et al., 2015).

- Valid concerns since the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5* (DMS-5) indicate excessive exercise as a symptom of many eating disorders (APA, 2013).
- Has led to a lack of understanding of the relationship between PA and eating disorders.

Only a few qualitative studies have been conducted on the matter (e.g., Moola et al., 2015; Johnston et al., 2011). For example, Moola et al. (2015) explored Canadian women's perspectives on exercise as they were living with anorexia nervosa.

- Limited exploration of other types of eating disorders and general PA (as opposed to exercise).

Research objective

Gain an understanding of how PA is perceived by women living with an eating disorder and explore how PA impacts their lives with an emphasis on their feelings towards PA, and describe their preferences for PA programs.

Methods

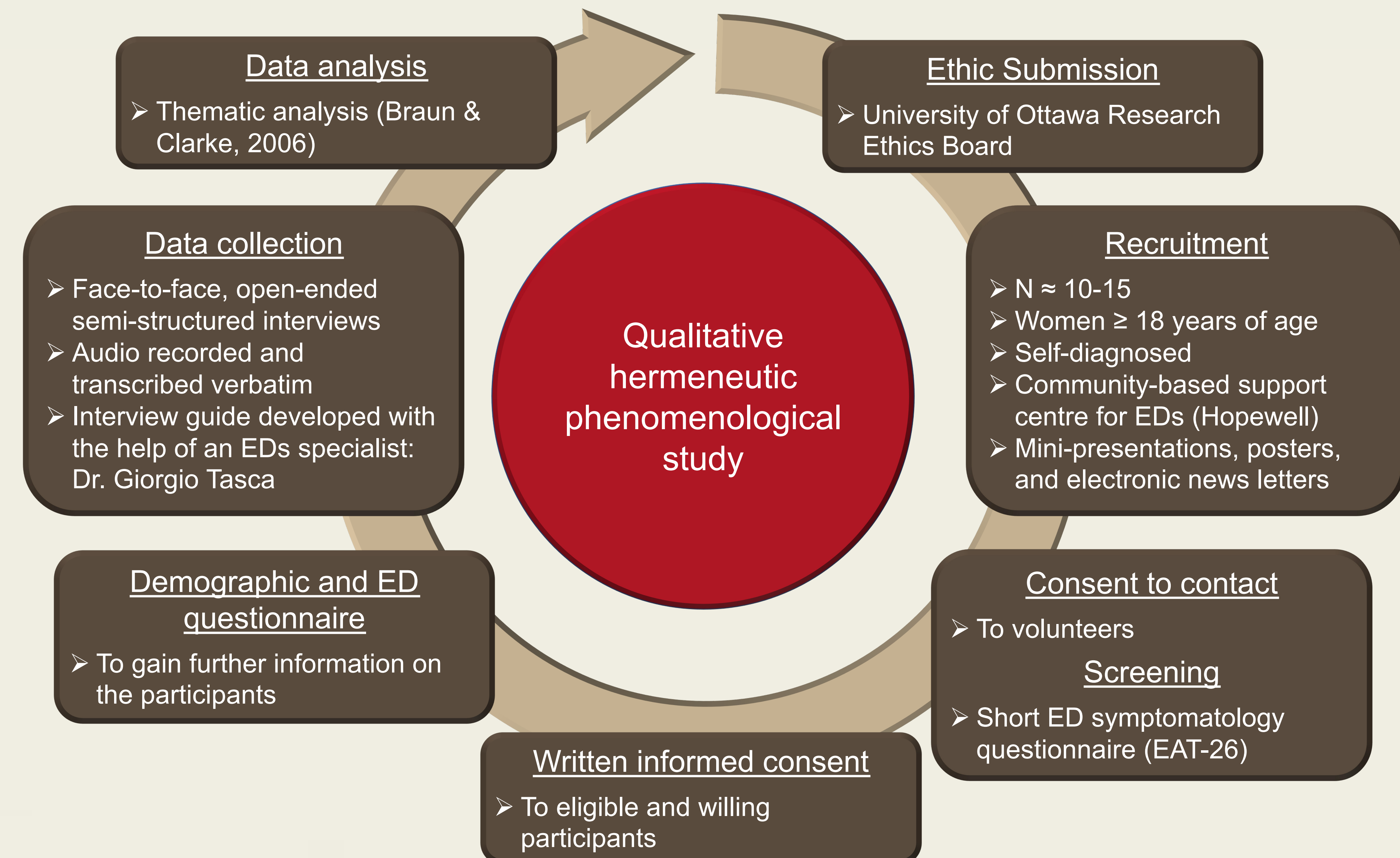


Figure 2. Summary of the methods for this proposed research study. ED = eating disorder.

Research contributions

- Generate an understanding of eating disorders and PA by placing an emphasis on the qualitative aspect of the relationship between PA and women living with an eating disorder rather than the quantitative aspect.
- Broaden the scope of previous research (e.g., Moola et al., 2015) by exploring how PA is perceived by women living with various types of eating disorders instead of focusing on exercise and women with anorexia nervosa.
- Can lead to the development of 'healthy' PA promotion strategies tailored for their specific needs.
- Can help physicians better understand how PA is perceived by women living with an eating disorder which in turn could encourage them to promote PA in this population.

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*** List of references and contact information available on request.