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*Published in:*  
Radiography

*DOI:*  
[10.1016/j.radi.2024.06.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.radi.2024.06.006)

*Publication date:*  
2024

*Document version:*  
Final published version

*Document license:*  
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*Citation for pulished version (APA):*  
Diaby, L. F., Mørup, S. D., Brage, K., & Roland Vils Pedersen, M. (2024). Perspectives on diagnostic radiographers' motivation for becoming researchers: A qualitative focus group study. *Radiography*, 30(4), 1219-1224. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.radi.2024.06.006>

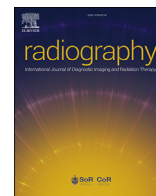
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## Perspectives on diagnostic radiographers' motivation for becoming researchers: A qualitative focus group study

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 28 March 2024

Received in revised form

29 May 2024

Accepted 9 June 2024

#### Keywords:

Radiography

Research

Advanced practice

Future of the workforce

Career paths

Sustainability

### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** This paper presents motivational factors to engage, start a research project and pursue a research career. The study aimed to investigate radiographer's motivation for engaging in research.

**Methods:** Eight radiographers from Denmark with experience in research were interviewed in a 2-h focus group interview in October 2023. This qualitative approach was selected to allow the participants to discuss their opinions and values. The discussions were audio recorded and transcribed before the thematic analysis was performed.

**Results:** The analysis revealed six main themes: the importance of radiographic research, the importance of radiographers' participation in research, research radiographers' motivation, funding and participation in research projects, demotivation and difficulties, and facilitating radiographic research in the future.

**Conclusion:** The participants were motivated by different factors. The participants found both research in radiography and radiographers' participation in research-related activities important, although they found lack of support from managers, funding, and time to be demotivational factors.

**Implication for practice:** This study contributes to the limited literature on motivational factors for becoming a researcher within radiography.

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### Introduction

There are currently 2600 registered radiographers in Denmark, but only a small fraction are undertaking research. The Danish Council of Radiographers estimates that 0.10–0.20% of radiographers in Denmark currently hold a PhD degree. This number is low compared to other countries, for example, the United Kingdom (1.67%), Sweden (0.54%), New Zealand (0.30%), United States (0.30%), Norway (0.29%), Finland (0.28%), and similar to Australia (0.20%).<sup>1</sup> This is confirmed by studies, e.g., a Norwegian study investigated research interests and found that 63% of the

respondents confirmed a need for research in radiography, but only 19% had been involved in research during a period of 5 years,<sup>2</sup> while an Australian survey with participants from diagnostic imaging found 38% of the participants identified as being research participants.<sup>3</sup>

In Denmark, the absence of a clearly defined academic pathway to aspire to obtain a PhD degree further complicates radiographers' ability to pursue a research career. The limited number of radiographers who have obtained a PhD confirms this. The motivations and factors driving radiographers to become researchers remain largely unknown.

Engaging in research and related activities is essential for professional advancement in order to assess current practices and provide evidence-based practice. Concern regarding the limited involvement of radiographers in research has been addressed.<sup>4–6</sup> Studies have identified various factors contributing to this issue

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from the perspectives of radiographers. One factor includes support from management,<sup>7</sup> while another is the absence of strategies to improve knowledge about radiographic research.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, improving clinical academic careers in radiography has the potential to support research participation.<sup>4</sup> According to Bolejko et al. (2008),<sup>8</sup> being endorsed by colleagues and other professionals was a factor that provided support. In contrast, a lack of knowledge and skills posed obstacles to involvement in research. An international survey of 33 countries identified obtaining ethics approval as a challenge, concluding that early ethics training and research-oriented education are needed within radiography programs.<sup>9</sup> It has been argued that including research training in radiography curricula would benefit the profession,<sup>10</sup> with potential benefits for students including networking opportunities, extra courses, attending summer programs and/or conferences, and focusing on learning and balancing interests.<sup>11–14</sup>

Regarding the current study, the objectives were focused on understanding the motivational factors for radiographers. Specifically, the study aimed to answer three key questions: a) What motivates radiographers to engage in research? b) What are the barriers that prevent radiographers from participating in research? and c) How can the involvement of Danish radiographers in research be increased?

**Material and methods**

This study utilised an explorative qualitative design to gain a better understanding of the unexplored field of research and radiography. The qualitative design was selected due to the limited published research on radiographers working within research. The data method was a focus group interview, as this method allows exploration of the topic and depth to identify common themes and patterns in the data. Data was collected at a research network meeting in 2023 for Danish radiographers who hold a PhD degree or are current PhD students.

In this paper, we define a Danish radiographer working in a hospital or educational setting with research tasks as a “research radiographer”. The study followed the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ).<sup>16</sup>

*Research group*

The primary interviewer was the first author, and the last author was the second interviewer, both females. The first author is a PhD student, and the last holds a PhD. They both have experience working with qualitative research projects.

The first author did not share any relationship with the included participants. The last author had a pre-existing professional

relationship with all the participants. The participants knew the first and last authors’ professional roles and knowledge from the research field. To ensure the integrity, respect, and anonymity of all participants, the authors followed a predetermined protocol for data collection and analysis. Ethical considerations included voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality, as the COREQ checklist stipulates.<sup>16</sup> A small pilot was performed to determine whether the questions were clear and easily understandable, and only a few minor modifications were performed.

*Focus group design*

The eligibility criteria to be included were a radiography certificate, active involvement in research for a minimum of 1 year and having published at least one peer-reviewed article in a scientific journal.

Six weeks before the scheduled meeting in 2023, all attendees were invited to participate in the focus group interview by e-mail. Study information and consent forms were e-mailed to the participants two weeks before the meeting. The week before the meeting, registered participants received an e-mail with more study details and a consent form. Seven radiographers from various parts of Denmark volunteered to participate, and one additional radiographer decided to participate during the meeting. No dropout occurred. To ensure anonymity, details about the hospital and focus group date are not disclosed.

The focus group interview was performed in the presence of the first- and last author and the participants. Ethical rules, mobile phone rules, confidentiality, and the study’s purpose were presented before the interview started. The participants were advised to speak one at a time and acknowledge and reflect on other participants’ perspectives. The participants were asked to give oral and written consent to participate in the focus group interview and to consent to disseminate their anonymous information in publications and presentations before participating. Written consent was signed on the day of the interview.

An interview guide with open-ended questions was created to structure the interview based on the three research questions (Table 1). To create a dynamic environment, the participants were asked to freely express and reflect on the point of view of other participants during the focus group interview.

The interview followed these topics: 1) what motivates radiographers to be involved in research, 2) what factors prevent radiographers from being involved in research, and 3) how can research involvement be increased for radiographers?

The interview was audio-recorded, and the recording was deleted after transcription. Data concerning gender, age, age

**Table 1**  
Interview guide.

Introductory Questions	I would like you all to think about the word “research” in the context of your work as a radiographer (1 min). Now, what do you see as the purpose of this?
1. What motivates radiographers to be involved in research?	In your opinion, what is the benefit of radiographers conducting research (are part of the research)? Why do you do or participate in research projects? How did you get involved in research? Before you finished your bachelor’s degree, did you already know that you wanted to do research?
2. What factors prevent radiographers from being involved in research?	What will be the motivating factors for and against you starting or participating in research projects? (For and against) How do you think more radiographers can be motivated to participate in research activities?
3. How can research involvement be increased for radiographers	Why is it essential for the profession to conduct research? Do you have any ideas on how to increase radiographers in Denmark’s interest in participating in research activities? Will you, in the future, continue to do research?
Closure	Is there anything else you would like to add?

at which the radiography degree was obtained, age at which the PhD degree was obtained (if applicable), and academic title were collected from participants. The first and last authors compared field notes after the interview, which lasted 2 h and concluded upon reaching data saturation. The audio transcription was not shared with the participants due to ethical considerations.

#### Data analysis and findings

The interview was analysed based on the rules of Malterud's four stages for systematic text condensation: 1) thorough reading of the material, 2) coding and thematisation of meaning-bearing units, 3) condensation of the meaning-bearing, division into sub-themes and selection of quotes, and 4) syntheses of condensates with loyalty to the informants' opinions.<sup>15</sup> In cases where disagreement occurred, a group discussion was engaged until a consensus was reached to enhance robustness and credibility. The analysis work was carried out in Nvivo14.<sup>15</sup> Two independent researchers (first- and last author) analysed the data to ensure reliability and validity.

#### Ethical approval

Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Committee of the University of Southern Denmark (ID number 23/47841) on July 28th, 2023. All data was anonymised, and informed consent was provided orally and in writing. Participants had the right to withdraw from the study until data analysis was performed.

### Results

We invited a total of 17 researchers, and initially, eight volunteered to participate in the focus group interview. The study population included four females and four males. The mean age of the participants was 46 years (range 34–56 years). The radiographers were employed from five different Danish hospitals and University Colleges. The participants had a mean age of 19 years of experience (9–30 years). Five participants obtained their PhD degrees between 2017 and 2023, and three were PhD students. Five main themes and 27 subthemes were identified during the analyses of the interview (Fig. 1). The five themes are presented here with their condensates and selected quotes.

#### Importance of radiographical research

Research radiographers believe that radiography research is important for the patients, the profession, and clinical best practice. More specifically, generating qualitative, quantitative, and technical knowledge is essential for improving conditions for patients and radiographers. One participant emphasised that the profession must be developed so that new and better solutions can emerge to help the healthcare system under pressure. In this regard, economic analyses and feasibility studies are mentioned as being important to ensure good patient flow in the future:

*"It must also be applicable in a broad perspective ... our research can also mean that we get better workflows for both us and the patient ... If we can contribute with solutions or suggestions, it may lead to patients experiencing shorter waiting times, or the examinations taking less time or being less invasive ..."* (Participant (P) 6)

#### Importance of radiographers' participation in research

The participants assert that radiographers must engage in research activities since they are uniquely positioned to observe, understand, and advocate for changes in imaging protocols, being the first to see and handle medical imaging material. They are also responsible for ensuring patients receive the best possible diagnostic images. The participants agreed that only radiographers can fully comprehend, observe, represent, and enhance radiographical practice, as they possess a comprehensive overview of their practice:

*"I have been exposed to the fact that there were some things that I could not get to fit, measurements I got out .... it turned out that there were bugs in the software. But no one else had discovered that, and I just think we see that repeatedly. And it's not physicists who observe it."* (P3)

Another participant added:

*"If we don't conduct research, then no one is doing research in radiography, and there are so many things that will not be uncovered .... there is no one else who is interested in radiography but us."* (P4)

All the research radiographers expressed that they often participate in research projects. Some research radiographers note that there was not always an understanding of why their perspectives were important to include in projects. They also emphasised that radiographers must make themselves and their skills indispensable:

*"If we don't participate as radiographers in research, we end up with some articles that say – a CT or an MRI scan was performed. A CT scan can be done in 100 different ways, and if it is not described properly, then you do not know how it was performed."* (P8)

Some participants stated that clinicians call for radiographers to participate in their research projects to ensure technical quality. Some participants expressed that other professions do not understand what radiographers can contribute due to the lack of a long-standing academic research tradition. However, according to the participants, this is changing:

*"We have a lot to contribute with, as we are neither physicists, medical doctors nor nurses. But we have an interest in each of those worlds ... And I think they only realise it when you get involved."* (P4)

#### Research radiographers' motivation

The participants were asked how they became involved in research activities. The eight participants shared different stories. Two participants mentioned that it was the opportunity for a higher salary or that research activities became a part of their employment. Two other participants stated that their research careers began with department managers encouraging them to engage in research, seeing potential in them, and facilitating their entry into research. The four last participants stated that curiosity primarily drove them into research, compelling them to explore opportunities and solve problems in their daily clinical work. Regarding what motivates the participants to continue engaging in research, all participants unanimously express that recognition and acknowledgement play a significant role in whether they find research enjoyable and exciting.

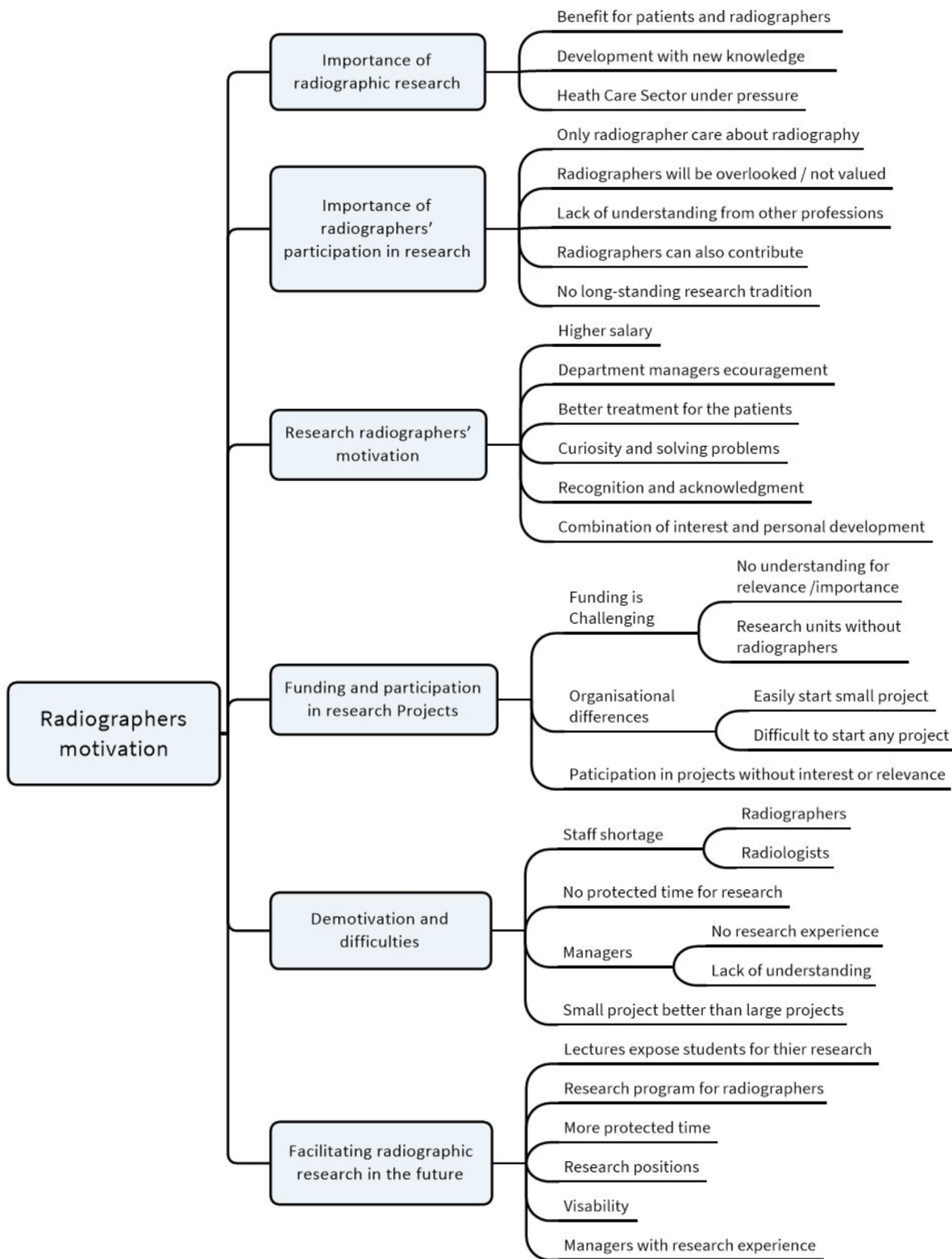


Figure 1. Code three over subthemes.



Recognition can be compliments, acceptance and implementation of research results in clinical practice:

*"It's great that it benefits the patients. But if I'm being completely honest, I think it's the tasks that matter. If I had found it boring, even if it benefited the patient, I wouldn't have stayed. That's because I find it's cool and exciting to do, and of course, it's great that it benefits the patient." (P1)*

#### Funding and participating in research projects

Getting funding to initiate research projects is something the participants find very challenging. Organisational differences have an influence on the participant's ability to start projects and secure funding. Some participants can easily start smaller projects, and some must pitch all their ideas to a research unit, which often does not understand the importance of radiographic projects. Because funding is a hindrance, the participants state that they sometimes participate in research projects, though they may not always find them most relevant or of personal interest. They also mention that it's particularly challenging for radiographers to secure funding since providers often lack deep insight into radiography:

*"It can be difficult to make the funds aware of what is important about using 20 mAs compared to 40 mAs. People can't relate to that." (P6)*

#### Demotivation and difficulties

Staff shortage among radiographers and radiologists, lack of time and lack of managers' understanding were stated as the main obstacles to conducting research at the hospitals.

The participants express that more time and resources need to be allocated to maintain their research activities, as well as broadly within the profession, as many projects are not completed because of lack of time. However, the participants acknowledge that they must help the clinical staff when they are in shortage, regardless of their research-related work deadlines. Participation in too large projects with too many stakeholders and health professionals is also demotivating for some participants. In large projects, they do not feel it is possible to gain much influence on the study design and protocol. Lastly, the participants felt managers did not always understand that conducting quality research required consistent quality time. The participants also somewhat believed that the reason for the managers' lack of understanding of the prioritisation of research was because the managers themselves did not have solid research experience or did not have a realistic view of what it takes to conduct research:

*"It's not necessarily because they don't know about it. Our former head of research also believed that you could write a paper in a week. It doesn't take long; you can easily do that ... Or an abstract during lunch break." (P1)*

#### Facilitating radiographic research in the future

Concerning involving and motivating more radiographers to participate in research activities, the participants mentioned that they see a bright future as more lecturers at University Colleges conduct research. As a result of this, students hear and are exposed to research more than before. Two participants also mentioned that their department had started a program for radiographers who were interested in participating in research-related activities with

success. Lastly, the participants emphasised that creating more work positions which include research activities can influence radiographers' motivation to participate in research activities:

*"There need to be posted positions so that you can see that there is an opportunity, and not always let positions be given to one within the department. After all, there are no positions at all today. Visibility! It is not just visibility that you can make research but also the fact that you can make research your livelihood. So, more positions." (P5)*

Considering the participant's own future, they stated that they consider not to participate in research activities if more time and resources are not allocated:

*"If nothing changes and I keep being moved into the clinic on my research days, I will probably start thinking about finding another field of work. Otherwise, I will not be able to continue [working as a researcher]." (P8)*

## Discussion

This study highlights the importance of radiographical research in enhancing patient care and advancing radiography practice. It emphasises that radiographers play an essential role in generating knowledge that benefits patients and practitioners and contributes to developing more efficient healthcare processes.

Corresponding with these insights, the academic evolution of radiographers, as explored by Andersson et al. (2020), indicates a substantial shift towards a research-oriented approach to professional development within radiography.<sup>1</sup> This shift demonstrates a growing recognition of the importance of research in healthcare advancement, suggesting that radiography is increasingly valuing and integrating research into its core practices.

Further reinforcing this perspective, the studies by Vikestad et al. (2017) and Saukko et al. (2021) explore radiographers' attitudes toward research, uncovering a broadly positive stance and a clear understanding of its relevance to clinical practice.<sup>2,5</sup> These studies align with current research findings, describing research as an integral part of radiography. This attitude is essential for fostering innovation and improved solutions within the healthcare sector, especially in environments constantly facing new challenges and rapid changes. The engagement of radiographers in research is perceived not merely as a professional obligation but as a fundamental component for advancing healthcare practices and enhancing patient outcomes.

The current study also aligns with the work of Simcock et al. (2021), who explored the complexities and rewards of a clinical academic career for radiographers.<sup>4</sup> They discuss the intricate balance between professional growth and ethical considerations, particularly regarding patient privacy. This discussion resonates with the current study's emphasis on ethical and responsible research practices, highlighting the nuanced challenges faced by radiographers who engage in research alongside their clinical responsibilities. The insights from Simcock et al. (2021) are especially relevant, emphasising the need for radiographers to maintain high ethical standards and ensure patient confidentiality while pursuing academic and clinical excellence.

In examining the motivations leading radiographers towards research, studies by Abuzaid et al. (2023) and Pedersen et al. (2023) reveal a range of factors, from financial incentives to professional curiosity and encouragement from management.<sup>6,7</sup> These motivations mirror the current study's findings, where recognition, the

implementation of findings, and the aspiration to make a difference for patients are significant factors encouraging radiographers to engage in research.

The current study also sheds light on the significant challenges that radiographers face in the realm of research, particularly in securing funding and gaining organisational support. These challenges are also found in the work of Bolejko et al. (2022), who comprehensively explored the barriers facing radiography research.<sup>8</sup> Their findings point to the need for enhanced institutional backing and a more profound understanding and appreciation of radiography's unique contributions to the realm of research. This parallel between the two studies underscores a broader trend in the field, emphasising the necessity of robust support structures to facilitate and amplify the impact of radiography research.

Additionally, the significance of research ethics training, as highlighted by Bockhold et al. (2022), aligns with the current study's findings.<sup>9</sup> The focus on ethical training is not just a matter of compliance but a cornerstone in ensuring the integrity and reliability of research, especially in handling patient data and navigating the intricacies of the digital healthcare landscape. This aligns with the current study's emphasis on the necessity for clear guidelines and comprehensive education in digital professionalism for radiographers, pointing to the growing recognition within the radiography field of the need to integrate ethical training as a key component of both professional development and research excellence.

Finally, as highlighted by England and McNulty (2020), including research in radiography curricula is crucial for nurturing a research-oriented mindset among future radiographers.<sup>10</sup> However, the absence of a Master's degree program in Radiography in Denmark presents a notable challenge, often resulting in fewer radiographers pursuing advanced degrees. This educational gap is further compounded by the fact that those who attain higher degrees usually find career opportunities outside the field of radiography.

### Strength and limitations

The participating radiographers were informed about the study's aim, which may have influenced bias. However, this potential bias is mitigated because the first author is unfamiliar with the participants.

Hearing about other radiographers' motivation for being involved in research may have influenced the responses, as none of the participants reported extrinsic motivational factors such as fame, power, or influence on the number of citations. This may be caused by the fact that only a few senior researchers were participating (level of associate professor), and the remaining participants had obtained their PhD within the last four years (level of assistant professor or postdoctoral researcher). In a focus group interview, there is a risk that the moderator is influenced by the participant's responses, e.g., by asking leading questions. In this study, we had one primary moderator (first author) and a second moderator (last author) to limit this potential bias.

### Conclusion

Participants emphasised the significance of radiographers engaging in research driven by intrinsic motivations like improving patient care and tackling challenging research questions. Some were also motivated by curiosity or incentives from leaders or finances. Despite varied paths into research, all stressed the importance of fostering research interest, having role models, and access

to research opportunities. They advocated for dedicated time and resources for research, citing barriers such as lack of support, funding, staff, and time constraints. This hindered project completion, leading some to consider leaving radiography for research careers elsewhere. A sustainable strategy for Danish radiography research is crucial to maintain motivation and facilitate future growth in research participation and projects.

### Author contribution

The last author initiated the project. The first and last author led the project and wrote the protocol and interview guide. The last author applied for research ethical approval. All authors contributed to writing the first draft. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

### Funding

No funding was received for this project.

### Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank all the participants for all their contributions to this project.

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