Author's response to reviews

Title: Harnessing Social Networks along with Consumer-Driven Electronic Communication Technologies to Identify and Engage Members of 'Hard-to-Reach' Populations: A Methodological Case Report

Authors:

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Version: 2 Date: 6 October 2009

Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Dr Talbot,

Thank you for your email message dated 1 October, in which you shared reviews from the above-captioned manuscript, and invited me to resubmit a revised version.

Reviewer 1, who did not provide specific suggestions for revision, reports, “This is a well written article that explores, in a unique fashion, something of importance to many of us who work with difficult sample collections.”

According to Reviewer 2, “the use of RDS [respondent-driven sampling] for ‘qualitative’ or ‘in-depth interview’ purposes is worth exploring and this article takes that approach. This article also makes innovative use of electronic communications to start the recruiting chain.” Reviewer 2 provided three suggestions for improvement, none of which were deemed essential.

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<th>Suggestion</th>
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<td>1. Clarify geographic scope of target sample.</td>
<td>I have revised the ‘recruitment objectives’ subsection under Methods.</td>
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| 2. Indicate that two-stage sampling could have been used in this study, by sampling veterinarians first, followed by their clientele. | I agree with this observation, but would prefer to highlight the electronic communication innovation in the Discussion. Researchers have previously engaged veterinarians in this fashion. See, for example: Coe, Jason B., Cindy L. Adams, and Brenda N. Bonnett. 2009. Prevalence and nature of cost"


3. Since this paper contributes to non-probabilistic sampling methods for qualitative research, suggesting that RDS sampling may be appropriate for research requiring population representativeness (in quantitative terms) may be misleading.

I agree with this observation, and in response, have eliminated this part of the discussion.

Please find attached a version of a manuscript that takes these reviews into account. I have made additional minor changes, the most substantive of which is to include “social networks” in the title. I hope to see this version published in *BMC Medical Research Methodology*.

Sincerely,

Melanie Rock, PhD (Anthropology), MSW
AHFMR Population Health Investigator
CIHR New Investigator