Reviewer's report

Title: "Do I really want to do this?" Longitudinal cohort study participants' perspectives on postal survey design: a qualitative study

Version: 1 Date: 11 October 2010

Reviewer: Carina Thorstensson

Reviewer's report:

The manuscript "Do I really want to do this?" Longitudinal cohort study participants' perspectives on postal survey design: a qualitative study aim to explore reasons for decisions about participation in a longitudinal cohort study using postal questionnaires. This paper concerns an important topic, however, there are some issues that need consideration.

Major compulsory revisions

To use qualitative methodology seem adequate, however, it is not clear what this study adds to the existing bulk of knowledge regarding reasons for participation, especially in relation to ref no 10 (Nakash et al). This study seems to cover more the issue of internal completion of a questionnaire/survey, and participants’ perception of the design of the questionnaire. The sample includes only participants. To be able to conclude anything about reasons for participation, it is essential to include non-participants. I suggest that the paper is rewritten to include only participants’ perceptions about study design, since the results reported cover mainly this aspect.

Was the sample a convenience sample, or was it purposefully chosen? A table describing the characteristics of each participant would be useful (i.e. age, gender, MSD, occupation, response time) Did they differ from the participants who declined? What were the reasons for declining?

The open ended question, topic areas and interview guide need to be described in detail to allow for audit trail.

Was bracketing used? If so, please describe how. How was reflexivity used?

To be able to judge the trustworthiness of the results, longer quotes are needed, and also, more quotes are needed to illustrate the results reported. For example, four out of five categories in Theme 3 have no quotes to illustrate the results.

The combination of results and discussion could be used, but requires a careful distinction between what is a result of the study and what is authors’ interpretations and discussion. This needs clarification.

Conclusion should be brief.

What were limitations of this study?
Discretionary revisions:
- Framework allows for comparisons within and across categories. Was there any pattern to be seen when late responders were compared with those who responded to the first mail-out?
- Results/discussion, theme 2, the length of the survey is discussed in both “First impression of the survey” and in “Survey length/time”. Is there a specific reason for this? Overlap between categories? Patterns seen?

Minor essential revisions:
The category “Survey length/time” in Theme 2 is called only “survey length” in box 1. Please, be consistent.
Theme 2, “Scales used”, line 10. The abbreviation ‘HS’ is not explained.

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**
I declare that I have no competing interests