Reviewer’s report

Title: The feasibility of gathering opinion leader data for a tailored implementation intervention in a secondary healthcare setting: a comparison of response rates to alternative data collection techniques

Version: 2 Date: 2 December 2013

Reviewer: Alix Hall

Reviewer’s report:

Major strengths:
The premise of this study is interesting and worthwhile for methodology practices in social network research.

Major weakness:
The paper itself is hard to follow and very confusing in places. Justification for why this research was undertaken is poor. More evidence and research needs to be presented to explain why this study was undertaken and what the results actually mean for future research practices. Although the authors indicate that they have attempted to conform to the CONSORT reporting guidelines there are still many sections that are missing that could be included. It is suggested that the paper needs major revisions, particularly in the presentation and writing of this study.

Major compulsory revisions:

Abstract
1. More information is needed in the methods section explaining what the two different questionnaires consisted of.
2. Please include details on the methods used to compare outcomes in the two groups is needed.
3. In the results please provide data to illustrate exactly what was found.

Introduction
1. The introduction is very difficult to follow. It is often difficult to understand what this research is about. It also lacks a solid justification as to why this research was undertaken.
2. It is suggested that the introduction is re-written and structured with more focus on including previous research to support the assumptions made and to help illustrate why this research is necessary.
3. Specifically, it is suggested that the authors include the following information in their introduction, making sure they use prior research to support their arguments.
a. A paragraph explaining why influencing health care behaviour is important (provide examples and evidence from previous research to support this research). At present this paragraph is very sparse and hard to follow.

b. Define what an opinion leader is. Explain how OLs can be used to change health care behaviour – At present I find this section of the paper very lacking and as such am not convinced of the usefulness of using OLs to change health care behaviour. This is important as this seems to be the basis of completing this study, to help use OLs to inform their own intervention.

c. Describe the different methods that can be used to identify opinion leaders and the limitations and advantages associated with these methods. At present very limited detail is provided to explain the different methods, and I find it hard to understand what each method is and what is involved. It is also not exactly clear how “sociometric methods are the most valid and reliable way of collecting OL information,” as is claimed by the authors.

d. The difficulties in collecting OL information using these techniques need to be further explained and illustrated using examples from the literature. At present the difficulties in using the current methods is quite poor and a bit confusing. This section is important as it provides the main basis as to why it is necessary to try and identify alternate methods of identifying OLs.

e. The section describing social network analysis needs to be re-written. At present it is difficult to follow and people not familiar with this technique may find it difficult to understand what it is, how it is used and the limitations to its use.

4. At present there is a lack of details on previous research in this area. When the authors do mention previous research they fail to include details on how this previous research supports their argument. For example it is mentioned how OLs have been successfully used in Peru to change risky sexual behaviour, yet they fail to mention how OLs were used in this instance and how they were successful. This information is needed to help justify their argument.

5. At the end of the introduction please remove the sentence “this paper suggests that even brief sociometric data….” This statement should be in the discussion when the authors describe what was found in this article.

Methods

1. More information is needed for all sections of the methods. At the moment it is unclear what was done exactly and in what order.

2. It is suggested that the authors use the CONSORT guidelines to re-structure their methods section. There are still many details stipulated in the CONSORT reporting checklist that could be included in the methods section of this paper that are currently missing. For example the following information is missing but could be included: the method of randomisation used to allocate participants to the different questionnaires, who conducted the randomisation, whether it was blind etc.

3. The use of headings in the methods section may help to organise this section and make it more clear what the authors did. At the moment it is often confusing
as to what this study entailed and how exactly the research was carried out. Headings such as: design, participants, questionnaire instruments (which is already included), data collection or procedures and data analysis (already included) may help.

4. It is suggested that more details on the larger study are provided. Please describe the survey that was used so the readers have a sense of what was involved.

5. The authors speak of an intervention they had planned to conduct and how they would use the OL information to help inform the intervention. It would also be good to have a section describing the planned intervention and how the information on OL’s would help to develop and inform this intervention. I think these details are essential to help provide context for this research and again help to justify why this study was conducted and how the results will help to inform future research practices.

6. I find the section describing why the two different questionnaires were chosen confusing. I do not understand why the authors would wish to use a questionnaire that would “be limited to identifying opinion leaders” when the aim of this study was to try and identify an efficient method of identifying OLs to help develop behaviour change interventions.

7. When explaining when the questionnaire was carried out please stipulate the exact months and not the season. Using “spring” may be a bit confusing for international readers.

8. The sentence “As this study forms part of a larger implementation programme, this meant we could identify respondents…” is really confusing. Please re-write. It sounds as though the questionnaire may have been delivered to some participants after the intervention was conducted?

9. Following the CONSORT checklist move the paragraph “A proportion of questionnaires…” to the results section to help describe the number of participants lost from each group and why they were lost.

Data analysis

1. I find the section describing the respondent coverage rates very hard to follow.

2. It is also unclear how respondents who reported more than one OL were accounted for.

Tables

1. For Table 2 it is suggested that the authors include a footnote describing how respondent coverage and population coverage is defined and calculated.

2. The authors do not describe or refer to Table 3 in the manuscript. It is not clear what the purpose of this table is. Please consider removing or make sure the contents is described in the results section.

Results:

1. Again the use of the CONSORT checklist may help to organise the results section, making it clearer what was found.
2. Do the authors have any information on the participants who took part in this study? For instance how many males, how many nurses, years of work etc? If so please include a participants section to the results section.

3. It is suggested that the authors describe the overall response first, and then move onto the response rates to the OL section as these are, in a sense, two different outcomes.

4. Include data in the results section on the response rates for each individual section.

Discussion

1. Similar to the introduction the discussion requires more discussion on previous research in this area. It is suggested that the authors try and provide a more in-depth discussion of how their results compare to previous research in this area.

2. The authors make several assumptions has to why the response rates for both methods were low, including the length of the questionnaire. More evidence from previous research is needed to explain and justify why these assumptions are made. For example a Cochrane review by Edwards et al, 2009 on methods to increase response rates to postal and email questionnaires found shorter surveys to be significantly associated with higher response rates. Such evidence from previous research will help strengthen the discussion and also place more credit to the author’s conclusions.

3. Similar other explanations and assumptions made by the authors need to be justified with previous research or further detail as to how such conclusions are reached.

4. It is suggested that the authors try and re-organise their discussion based on the CONSORT checklist. At present there is no discussion on the limitations of the study, or much discussion or interpenetration of the results in relation to previous studies in this area.

5. The authors claim that “these experiences within a large organisation suggest the success of data collection and exploitation…may be dependent upon the size of the organisation.” It is not clear how the results of this study support this assumption. Please clearly explain how the results led to this conclusion.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**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