Reviewer's report

Title: Fighting for control in an unpredictable life - a qualitative study of older persons' experiences of living with chronic dizziness.

Version: 2  Date: 26 June 2014

Reviewer: Martin Mueller

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General comment:

The considered manuscript reports a well-designed and accurately conducted study on the experiences of older individuals suffering from dizziness. Even though vertigo and dizziness in the aged is known to be one of the major health problems, in-depth research in this population, especially from the perspective of the affected individuals is limited. Thus, this work has the potential to significantly add to the body of knowledge. However, there are some major issues which have to be addressed and resolved.

• Major Compulsory Revisions (The author must respond to these before a decision on publication can be reached. For example, additional necessary experiments or controls, statistical mistakes, errors in interpretation).

1. The content of the introduction section is relevant; however, the structure is not as it is to be expected. As an example, I would expect the first para of the introduction much later, e.g. previous to the objectives. You might want to rewrite the section. You should also consider shorten the paras with information on epidemiological data.

2. P. 5, l. 19-21: The sentence “A frequent and underdiagnosed…” is wrong, because you start with singular and end with plural. In addition, you introduce BPPV there but you don’t explicate it in the following para.

3. P.6, l. 3-4: I am not sure what the information on medical assessment adds to the paragraph. Please either clarify or delete the sentence.

4. On p. 6, l. 22ff, you state that the experiences of living with dizziness differ between older and younger persons, but you do not give an argument except the different stages of life. Maybe this has to do with different challenges at different stages of life. Please clarify this.

5. Methods: The content after line 20 on p. 7 (Participants) and the last sentence of the Procedure-section has to occur in the results section.

6. Methods – Procedure: One of the most critical aspects of each qualitative study is the selection of a sampling strategy. Please describe it in more detail and provide a compelling argumentation for the chosen strategy.

7. Please state if you have returned (a) the transcripts and (b) your analysis results/interpretations to the participants for validity reasons or explain why you
did not.

8. Results: The results are well written and the subcategories are nicely illustrated by the quotations. Can you please be more explicit in how you have developed the main categories? The examples in Tab. 1 are not that intuitive, e.g. why is “Cannot engage in social activities” a sub category of “Having a precarious existence” rather than a subcategory of “Striving towards normality”?

9. Discussion (p. 17, l.20&21-p. 18, l. 1&2): I am not totally aware of the meaning of this sentence. Why does describing disability with ICF categories contradict individual perception of the actual living situation? Please clarify.

10. Discussion (p. 20, l.7-10ff): I assume that “multimodal team” refers to “physical and psychological therapies”. Please clarify this by reorganizing or rewriting these sentences.

11. A limitations section is completely missing. Please add.

12. The conclusion section contains too much detailed results (l.12-17.) Please shorten it and give a brief summary about what this study adds.

13. You may want to have a look at two recent publications from my group on vertigo and dizziness and disability/participation in older adults:
Impact of vertigo and dizziness on self-perceived participation and autonomy in older adults: results from the KORA-Age study. Qual Life Res. 2014 Apr 10

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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.