Reviewer's report

Title: Experiences in applying skills learned in a Mental Health First Aid training course: a qualitative study of participants’ stories

Version: 2 Date: 10 September 2005

Reviewer: Jeffrey Fuller

Reviewer's report:

General

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

The revision of the paper has added both sufficient theoretical and methodological detail

1. There is now greater reference to the literature and concepts related to mental health helping from non-professionals, specifically about the value that these non-professionals bring as social supports.

2. The sampling technique is now more fully described.

3. The analysis is also more fully described. The decision to exclude from the analysis the first two authors because of potential bias is reasonable. However, this is also something of a limitation, as it has excluded the interpretive depth that could have come from two researchers how would have had considerable immersion in this topic. Given that much qualitative analysis is about interpretation, as long as the researcher’s position is made clear to the reader, then the possible bias in any interpretation is to some extent made transparent.

The approach to analysis seems to have been to report those themes that were raised most frequently. This is also reasonable, but on its own it only takes the interpretation so far. The notion of representation does not have to hold the same credence as with quantitative research and so the qualitative researcher might take the odd respondent (a bit like the outlier) and ask, what does this one respondent’s data tell me about this phenomenon. For instance, did the 4 respondent’s who were “unsure” about whether they were able to help describe things differently than the 44 who were definitely “yes”? This sort of analysis, in looking for the disconfirming case, could add depth to understanding about the value and limitations (if any could be found) of the Mental Health First Aid program.

The other limitation is in the use of a questionnaire as the approach to data collection. While this is pragmatic and enable data collection from 94 respondents (a fairly large number for a qualitative study), the limitation has been a lack of follow up to gain greater depth of particular issues and the
inability to verify with respondents that the researcher’s interpretation is in fact as a respondent understood things. An interview with some program participants may have been informative, for instance with the respondent who found the course confronting, as it may also have been with the respondent who stated that a follow up program would be beneficial.

I raise these as points to do with the rigor of the data analysis and also the limitations of the method.

I suggest that dealing with these issues are now discretionary for the authors. Dealing with them would add further to the quality of the paper.

4. Frequencies dealt with.

5. The readability of the paper has been improved with a better balance between researchers’ interpretation and illustrative quotes. The text now seems more clearly signposted with explanation and this assist the reader more easily to know what phenomena are being dealt with in a particular paragraph.

6. The authors have now been more reserved on their claim related to a lack of data about respondents possible over confidence.

What next?: Accept after discretionary revisions

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests