Reviewer's report

Title: Dilemmas in providing resilience enhancing social services to long-term social assistance clients. A qualitative study of Swedish social workers

Version: 3 Date: 6 November 2011

Reviewer: Mhairi Mackenzie

Reviewer's report:

I have five sets of revisions that might be classed as major compulsory revisions and one minor essential revision. I am happy to look at the manuscript again when resubmitted.

Minor Essential Revision: The quality of the English is generally very good but would benefit from a close read from a native English speaker - some words, for example, are used a little clumsily - the 'wants' of staff and clients is one example.

Major Compulsory Revisions:

(1) Much of the necessary context for this article seemed to be missing. I think it would have been really helpful to have information in tabular form concerning size, variation in, and make-up of, case-load. Some staff had experienced dramatic changes in case-load - why? Also, to have had more of a sense of the process by which clients enter/exit the system and an explanation for changing lengths of time that people make use of services - this was all a little opaque and easily remedied.

(2) I found some of the structuring of the article a bit unhelpful. In particular, the results section didn't work as well as it might. The article has been set up to consider two sets of issues - interactions between staff and clients and societal influences yet there is a long section at the beginning of the results section that doesn't seem to relate specifically to either - discussing whether staff like their work or not - this of course may be relevant but needs to be linked into the set of arguments that are being made.

(3) In terms of methods I would have like to have seen something about quality control - how were transcripts read and analysed - were there discrepant data and how were these treated?

(4) I think that the conclusion fits well with the findings but I would like to have seen a more sustained and critical reflection on the concept of resilience and how it is being used in policy terms - how does it connect to ideas of exclusion and assets-based concepts of community improvement? Is there a wider critique to be made here? Your article is not set up to fully do justice to these questions but I would like to have seen a few paragraphs inserted in background and discussion that connects with these ideas.
(5) The gist of your paper fits with Lipsky's street-level bureaucrat thesis (which also posits that slb 'discretion' is used particulary in the context of tightening resources. His work has obviously been utilised in a variety of geographical and professional contexts - more of a sense on how your findings connect to this literature would give more of a theoretical feel to the paper.

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