Reviewer's report

Title: Queer Quit: A pilot study of a smoking cessation programme tailored to gay men

Version: 3 Date: 12 December 2013

Reviewer: Sara Burke

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I wish to commend the authors for their clearly stated objectives and concise explanation of how data were collected. Given the emphasis that this study represents preliminary evidence for the potential utility of a larger program to be evaluated in more detail later, the data provide a reasonable test of the predictions.

As suggested by the reviewing guidelines, I have categorized my suggestions as "Minor Essential Revisions" or "Discretionary Revisions." I did not categorize any of my suggestions as "Major Compulsory Revisions."

Minor Essential Revisions

1. This sentence is confusing: "One element of particular importance appeared to be that an intervention for gay men would encourage recreational activities in a non-smoking environment, since smoking and going out to gay venues belonged together and smoking was perceived as a bonding element in the gay community" (Background paragraph 3). As far as I can tell, the quoted sentence is getting at the idea that past studies have suggested that smoking is perceived as a bonding activity in gay communities, so a successful intervention for gay men should reassure them that recreational activities are still possible without smoking. Regardless of whether I interpreted the sentence correctly, I think it would benefit from rephrasing.

2. Depression and anxiety are introduced as "mental disorders" (Background paragraph 4) but later assessed on scales. I would suggest referring to them as "threats to mental health" or choosing some other phrase that indicates that they are being treated as characteristics varying continuously in the population rather than discrete diagnostic categories.

3. The gender of the facilitators should be mentioned in the method section (paragraph 1 of the "Setting" section).

4. It is not clear why the authors calculated sums and means for the BDI and the BAI, as stated in the first paragraph of "Data preparation and analysis." They do not specify whether they use sum scores or mean scores in subsequent analysis procedures. The mean scores seem more appropriate given that the authors permit up to two missing values on each scale. Perhaps the note about computing sums could be removed, or the purpose in doing so could be clarified.
5. The results section entitled "Participants' feedback and interviews with facilitators" groups open-ended feedback into categories (e.g., "group dynamics") without explaining the grouping system. Were there subjective coders, for example? If the authors feel that these categories of responses were important, the system of categorization should be clarified. If not, perhaps they are not worth reporting at all. It is worth noting that the discussion does not refer to any of the categories of responses, suggesting that the authors may not view them as essential.

6. I feel that the authors go beyond the data in suggesting that the program could offer particular benefits for gay men with HIV (Discussion paragraph 6). They present no evidence that any of their participants had HIV or that their intervention had characteristics that would appeal to people with HIV. I believe that the authors meant only to imply that any program that helps people quit smoking could have unique health advantages for people with HIV, but their phrasing implies a stronger stance about the unique benefits of their program.

7. I also feel it is important to mention that, due to the lack of a control condition, this study cannot rule out the possibility that these men (selected specifically based on a pre-existing strong intention to quit) would have stopped smoking on their own without the program.

Discretionary Revisions

8. The GEE model evaluates all three timepoints. A stronger test of the long-term effect of the program might be to fit a model comparing the baseline to the 6-month followup, ignoring any improvements observed at the end of treatment.

9. Are there any past studies of gay men going through smoking cessation programs not specifically designed for gay men? Such studies might provide especially useful comparisons in the discussion section.

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.