Reviewer’s report

Title: Health promotion interventions for increasing stroke awareness in ethnic minorities: a systematic review of the literature

Version: 1
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Reviewer: Nathan Stephens

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Gardois et al have written an article reviewing health promotion interventions targeting stroke amongst minority populations. The chosen subject is topical and potentially very interesting. This reviewer has the following comments:

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Despite being a review article, the referencing is poor. Large parts of the results section discuss findings from the reviewed papers, but do not provide a corresponding reference number. This makes it difficult to read and impossible to confirm that the interpretation of the studies is correct.

2. Similarly, the grammar and phrasing of many parts could be improved. In particular, the use of terms such as “several”, “the literature”, “different channels and strategies”, “the majority of studies”, “about half”, “slightly more than half” and “occasionally” are very vague and should be specific and give the appropriate reference. Given that only 15 studies were included in the review, discussing the details of individual studies would be both informative and achievable.

3. The tables are poorly organized and hard to read. A landscape format may work better. There are parts of the tables where large bodies of text/sentences are written (e.g. Table 2 ‘population size’, Table 2 ‘intervention type’, Table 4 ‘cultural adaptation’). These would be more clearly presented in summary form or bullet point rather than just quoting text.

4. The Conclusions section (both in the abstract and the main text) is a discussion rather than a conclusion based on the authors’ review. Much of the text could be put in a subsection discussing gaps in knowledge/suggested areas for further research. This would allow the Conclusion to be more succinct and meaningful.

5. The subheadings in the Results section are confusing. For example, why was ‘the role of social networks and social support’ used when “no intervention was aimed at specific social networks within communities”? Likewise, what does “The importance of experiential education” mean, and why does it sit between the social network paragraph and the outcomes and study design paragraph? A review of the literature would be much more understandable if there was a consistent theme developing throughout rather than jumping from an overall discussion of the studies and methods to specific types of intervention and back to methodological considerations. If the authors grouped related paragraphs
together with more informative subheadings the reading of the article would be improved.

Minor Essential Revisions

1. The opening sentence of the abstract is misleading. Stroke is a considerable burden to all affected individuals, but it is perhaps more significant amongst minority groups (see Chen et al, Stoke 2013) potentially due to poorer awareness.

2. What are the “mix of professional roles” alluded to in the Results paragraph of the abstract?

3. There are many long sentences and some of the phrasing is written as if for prose rather than for a scientific article. For example; “when an ischaemic stroke occurs, the medical emergency service must be contacted immediately, in order to take a patient to the nearest stroke unit, where recombinant tissue plasminogen activator (rtPA) thrombolysis must be performed within three hours from the onset of symptoms to be effective” (Background section) could be rewritten as follows: “Current evidence based management of stroke involves rtPA thrombolysis within three hours from onset (Reference). It is thus imperative that symptoms are recognized early to allow prompt admission to the nearest stroke unit. There are other examples throughout the review, which the authors should amend in a similar manner.

4. There is inconsistency in some terms eg prehospital versus pre-hospital. The authors should choose one term and stick with it throughout.

5. EMS is abbreviated before it is defined and FAST is not defined at all.

6. “(…)” appears throughout the text and tables. What does this mean, or what information is missing?

7. What is ‘the appropriate response in BME communities”? (Background section)

METHODS

8. The opening sentence of Methods is illogical. How can the authors establish that no recent literature reviews exist without undertaking a systematic review of the literature first? Suggest this sentence is deleted or altered.

9. The Methods section includes a discussion about what is meant by a systemic review. This information is unnecessary given that the readership should be more than familiar with this terminology.

10. If the term “best published evidence” is to be used, the authors need to outline how they decided upon this. Was it group consensus, methodologically based, etc?

11. The PRISMA checklist is Figure 1, not Table 1.

12. On what basis do the authors classify the databases used as the “four most important”?

13. Table 1 is redundant as the information within it is better described in the text.
14. Define the term ‘health champions’.

15. Why were only articles published in peer-reviewed journals chosen? The rationale is not clear.

16. MS is not defined, and Excel and Endnote do not usually need to be referenced in the bibliography, but rather the manufacturer outlined in the text.

17. The first paragraph of ‘Data analysis and synthesis’ should be summarized. Additionally if terms like ‘coding’ are used, there should be a description of code categories.

18. The authors mention ‘in-depth reading.’ This term should not be used, or the definition of in-depth should be included along with why it is different to ‘normal’ reading.

RESULTS

19. The first part of the Results is a description of Methods and should be placed in the appropriate section.

20. Section 0 is alluded to in ‘Study populations’, but there does not appear to be such a section.

21. ‘Unsurprisingly’ is a weak word. Some readers may find the facts surprising.

22. The authors use ‘Finally’ several times. In one section, it is used twice within the same paragraph. More judicious use of the word is suggested.

23. The authors should specify what ‘single sessions’ involve (Interventions section)

24. Although 53% is over half, calling it a ‘majority’ is a little misleading. (Interventions section)

25. The authors should clarify the phrase “often only in passing” (The role of social networks…section)

26. Figure 1 legend should be expanded to define PRISMA.

27. Table 3 and 4 should have more informative titles (rather than including additional numbers), or a description of why the main characteristics were divided in the chosen manner.

28. Table 5 should specify what is meant by ‘effectiveness’.

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.