Author's response to reviews

Title: Using consecutive Rapid Participatory Appraisal studies to assess, facilitate and evaluate health and social change in community settings

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Dr. Moylan,

Very many thanks for your recent email and apologies for the slight delay. We are pleased that the reviewer found the paper interesting and well written, and are grateful that you sought review by an expert in this field.

We note that the reviewer suggests three compulsory revisions that we should address, and we are very happy to do this. We have found his suggestions very helpful in giving the discussion and conclusions balance. We respond to his three issues as follows, and have altered the article text accordingly.

1: Is RPA a robust and effective developmental method in which health professionals can play a useful role?

This case study does indeed illustrate that RPA can be utilised as a catalyst through which health and social work professions can gain a community orientation. A number of interventions, such as relating to housing or transport, can be initiated not only during times of economic investment as he suggests, but also because the process can in itself bring about changes as illustrated. We consider that this is a timely illustration of what can be done when, after 15 years rhetoric, the practice of primary care, public health and social care are coming together in organisations such as a Local Health Partnerships. Thus the local health and social environment in the UK is currently fertile. This is clarified in the discussion on Page 11 under “Lessons learnt”.

2: Is RPA equivalent to COPC?

We suggest that RPA is a useful mechanism for the initial assessment and implementation of COPC, and agree that COPC requires continuous commitment of resources for success. This is indeed what happened in the references that relate to the King’s Fund in London, where we agree that public involvement was minimal. At the referee’s suggestion we have inserted the fuller review of COPC by Iliffe and Lenihan, and the above point is clearly stated in the conclusion on Page 15 under “Next steps”.

3. Is RPA a method for increasing social capital?

The aim of the initial RPA in this study was to assess the health and social needs of people living in a well defined borderline deprived area, rather than to a bring a community orientation to the primary care services. An early finding in the interviews was a lack of social cohesion - this was identified and prioritised by informants, and interventions of a community development form were started. These interventions were quite distinct from improvements to primary care services. Thus in the discussion we do suggest that RPA did in this case stimulate social cohesion. This has been expanded upon on Page 12 under “Strengths of rapid appraisal”.

Many thanks for the considerable help you have given us. Please do not hesitate to contact us if there is any further clarification of these points needed.

With best regards,

Colin Brown, Simon Lloyd, Scott Murray