Reviewer's report

Title: Sexual health for women with RA in relation to physiotherapy - a qualitative study

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Reviewer: Mari Bjorkman

Reviewer's report:

To begin with, I want to say that the manuscript has great potential. The aim is interesting, the material seems to be satisfactory, and the phenomenological approach should be appropriate. The study deserves presentation, but the manuscript appears unfinished, prematurely submitted, and has to be thoroughly revised. I will here comment on the manuscript section by section, and indicate along the way what I think is Discretionary Revisions (DR), Minor Essential Revisions (MER), and Major Compulsory Revisions (MCR).

The manuscript should be shortened. MCR.

Background

The WHO definition of sexual health should be included in the list of references. MER.

The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health should be included in the list of references. MER.

Language, eg. “To receive such a well-being also requires…” I suppose the authors mean “to obtain, to achieve” DR.

The description of sexual health difficulties due to RA could be somewhat tightened up or condensed. DR.

Aim

The aim of the study that is presented in the manuscript is not sufficiently precise. What is aimed by exploring sexual health “in relation to” physiotherapy should be reworded in a way that explains what is intended to explore. See under “Results”. MCR.

Accordingly, the title should be rephrased. MCR.

Method

Has to be specified:
- Were interviews individual or group sessions? MER.
- The interview guide should be presented or described. MCR (see below).
- There are two authors – who conducted the interviews? MER.
The description of phenomenology and the Giorgi method should be presented together, not different places in the manuscript. DR.

The description of the Giorgi method is a bit unclear in relation to the material. The step 2 presented refers to “the psychological perspective” and “the researched phenomena”. These phrases could be substituted with the concrete perspective and phenomena explored. Step 3 – what is meant by “the psychological insight”? This is not a study of psychological phenomena? MER.

The recruitment process has to be described. MCR.

The section describing the informants should be condensed or tightened up, maybe presented in a table. DR. It includes a reference to “the ACR criteria”. These criteria should be either briefly presented, including a reference, or omitted (They do not seem necessary to describe the participants.). MER. “Biological medications” and “DMARDs” should also be briefly described, reworded or omitted. DR.

Results - MCR

The analysis of the material appears far from completed. There are four main themes, with a total of 15 subthemes. The subthemes under each main theme are of similar wording, so that it seems that a semi-structured interview guide with preformed categories has been employed. Therefore the interview guide should be accounted for (see above). If preformed categories have been used, the authors should illuminate how this is related to the principles of phenomenology. Of the four main themes, only one theme concerns physiotherapy. That is not negative in itself, but it does not correlate well with the aim of the study. Therefore, either the aim or the analysis should be reconsidered.

The presentation of the results is characterised by lists of quotes from the informants. Such lists of quotes strongly suggest that the analysis is unfinished. The researchers should read and interpret the statements of the informants, and then present their interpretations to the readers. The interpretations may be illustrated by a few quotes, ideally one per (main) theme. Furthermore, most of the numerous quotations do not give informative descriptions of the phenomena of sexual health, and should also therefore be omitted.

The number of themes may be reconsidered, depending on the interview method. If there were preformed categories, the existing division into themes may be relevant, and an improved analysis may enhance the readers’ learning. If, on the other hand, the themes emerged directly from the interpretation of the informants statements in a more classical phenomenological approach, the material should be analysed again looking for fusion of subthemes and reduction of number of themes.

Discussion
Some parts of the discussion seem to belong to the result section instead, as for example the first sentence under the subheading “What is sexual health?” The discussion sees the results in relation to existing research in a good way, but again it could focus more on the aim of the study, i.e. the potential of physiotherapy to improve sexual health. DR.

I miss an elaboration of the connection between physiotherapy, increased physical activity, and sexual health, which I understand is the main focus of the study. Does increased physical activity in itself improve sexual health, or is improvement dependant on physiotherapy? Is improvement mediated by improved bodily self esteem, increased strength, decreased pain etc? Such aspects are discussed, but could be more extensively discussed. DR.

The limitations and strengths of the study should be indicated. MER.

Mari Bjorkman

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

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**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.