Reviewer's report

Title: Treatment seeking behaviour in southern Chinese elders with chronic orofacial pain: A qualitative study

Version: 1 Date: 23 July 2013

Reviewer: Christophe Bedos

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting study that, I think, could be published in BMC Oral health. I would nevertheless strongly suggest that the authors rework some parts of their article, as I will explain in the next paragraphs.

1- Introduction and research question

The objective of the study is clear, but it does not need to mention the methods adopted: I suggest removing “using a qualitative approach” from the sentence stating the objective (at the end of the introduction). Besides, the introduction is well structured, but I regret that the authors put little emphasis on the usefulness of their research and how it could be useful in terms of public health (why is it pertinent to know how people experience and cope with OFP?).

2- Methods

The methodology section, according to me, needs to be improved, as it somewhat lacks clarity and explanations.

- The authors should first explain and justify their methodological approach, even though I agree with them that qualitative research is appropriate. Furthermore, they should clarify their “methodology” (not only their methods). Considering the research question, for instance, they could have chosen a phenomenological approach. It seems that they rather adopted a type of qualitative descriptive approach: they should mention it and maybe briefly refer to the literature (and explain why they chose it).

- I suggest that the authors describe their research design after presenting their methodology. They could indeed show how the focus groups and the individual interviews were linked and sequenced (it seems that the focus groups lead to the individual interviews: this should be explained a little and clarified).

- If possible, the context of the study could also be described. The authors indeed mention little about Honk Kong and the population that they are interested in. This is useful to allow the readers to relate the results to their own contexts.

- There is also room for improvement in the organization of paragraphs (or simply the labelling of the subsections). I found a little difficult to follow them when I reached the section entitled “semi-structured interviews”. I was indeed surprised to find another subsection entitled “participants”, as one had been already labelled “participants” before. Maybe the authors could simply mention a phase 1 (FG interviews), then the phase 2 (semi-structured interviews); for each phase,
they could describe the sampling strategy, the recruitment, and the data collection. The data analysis of the FG could also be better explained, and the authors could show more how this phase influenced the next one.

- With respect to the Focus groups phase, I suggest that the authors provide more information on the way they recruited the participants (what are these community groups? What kinds of people attend them? How did they invite people to participate?), how they conducted the interviews (did the moderator have an interview guide? Was there an assistant moderator taking notes? Etc.)

- With respect to the semi-structured interviews phase, the inclusion criteria should be mentioned in a section on sampling rather than in the section that describes the way interviews were conducted. In addition to that, the authors could provide more information on the data analysis: for instance, who conducted the analysis (and the collection)? Was the process between data collection and analysis iterative? How rigorous was this process? (how was validity ensured?)

3- Results
The results are interesting and provide an overview of what people affected by OFP may experience. It would have been interesting to look at patterns in the way people experience and adapt to symptoms. For instance, were there people who endured symptoms without requiring any help? Furthermore, were there patterns in the way participants consulted professional or traditional healers? (Are there sequences or pathways in the way people accessed care and services?)

In brief, I have the feeling that, maybe, the authors could have provided a deeper analysis of their interviews (cf. the literature on medical and dental care pathways). The fact that the authors, in several instances, described contrasting experiences and perspectives between participants would tend to support my feeling…

4-Discussion
The discussion is interesting and reads easily. This being said, I regret that the authors did not provide a better identification of key processes or issues. As a matter of fact, the authors did not provide strong recommendations or suggestions for action. As I mentioned in the introduction: Why was this study necessary? And what does it provide in terms of actions, policies, etc.? This study is interesting, but I feel that it could have provided more…
Besides, the authors should add a section on the limitations (and strengths) of their study.

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.