Reviewer's report

Title: Factors influencing adherence to regular exercise in middle-aged women: a qualitative study to inform clinical nursing practice

Version: 1 Date: 15 November 2013

Reviewer: Terra TM Murray

Reviewer's report:

This article was well written, and on a timely and interesting topic, examining barriers and enablers to exercise in women, specifically mid aged women.

Please see specific comments and feedback below:

1. Discretionary Revision:
   I wonder though why the article and title is particularly focused on clinical nursing practice, as there are a host of practitioners who could benefit from the results of the study and who counsel people with respect to physical activity/exercise. There seemed to be nothing in the article in particular that made this paper unique to nursing practices per se.

Background:

2. Discretionary Revision:
   The authors are examining barriers and enablers to exercise/physical activity in middle aged women. The question is clearly defined in the study. The authors state that “little is known about effective interventions to enhance” (page 5). I would probably be a bit more cautious with this statement. There is a considerable amount of research on exercise interventions in general, while there is no review for mid aged adults, other research is available that informs the topic (e.g., see Hall & McAuley, 2010 Physical Activity in Middle-aged and Young-old Adults: The Roles of Self-efficacy, Barriers, Outcome Expectancies, Self-regulatory Behaviors and Social Support; van der Bij, A.K., Laurant, & Wensing 2002. Effectiveness of physical activity interventions for older adults: A review.).

Methods:

The methods seem appropriate and sound, although my expertise is not in this particular methodology, so I have no specific comments here.

3. Discretionary Revision:
   I do think it would be helpful to have some sample characteristics available to help better describe your sample to your readers. For example, how much exercise were participants in the study currently engaging in? The authors note that they were participating in regular exercise, but no further detail is given. It would be helpful to present more detail here. Were these women currently
meeting guidelines from CSEP, (or older Health Canada guidelines), for example? Given that physical activity and exercise research acknowledges that there may be different barriers or motivators for exercise at various phases (exercise initiation/adoption versus exercise maintenance, for example), it may be important to note the current level of activity people in the study were engaging in. This may also play a role in your discussion, as these women all seem to be currently active.

Discussion:

4. Discretionary Revision:
In the discussion, you state that “exercise patterns of middle aged women are multifaceted.” What is meant by this statement? For example, what are the patterns and how are they multifaceted?

5. Discretionary Revision:
I am not certain that the subtheme of positive feelings corresponds well with self-efficacy? I think this subtheme needs to be better described in the discussion section. Feelings is a very broad category, and were women specifically talking about attitudes and/or affect (exercise making them feel good) or feelings of confidence in exercise and the tasks associated with it, which is more analogous to self-efficacy I think. In your Results section you discuss what could be more analogous to self-efficacy (e.g., frustration with perceived lack of ability), but you also discuss other feelings or mood states which I think is not reflected by Bandura’s concept of self-efficacy, but rather mood states, and attitudes. It might be worthwhile to tease these out form each other as they are theoretically and conceptually distinct.

6. Discretionary Revision:
I made an earlier comment in your Methods section about providing some detail on current level of exercise. I think that may play a role in your discussion, as one of the aims of the study is to inform nursing practice. It is likely important than that nurses and other practitioners are aware that barriers and enablers may be unique to women who already have some experience with exercise, or are currently active, and women who are initiating or taking up exercise for the first time may experience different barriers and enablers.

**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