Reviewer's report

Title: Building Reproductive Health Research and Audit Capacity and Activity in the Pacific Islands (BRRACAP) Study: Methods, Rationale and Baseline Results

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Reviewer: David MacLaren

Reviewer's report:

This manuscript reports on an important program to increase the research capacity of reproductive health clinicians in six South Pacific nations. The manuscript provides a description of the program and presents results from a baseline survey of research capacity/experience of program participants. The manuscript also includes methods used to gather and analyse data that informed the program and describes a mentoring process that program leaders will use to support program participants over two years.

This is an important paper that should be published – however there are a number of improvements that need to be made prior to publishing. The authors struggle between (i) describing the program and the myriad issues involved in developing and implementing the program with participants from 6 countries (which is very important) and (ii) presenting results that are directly achieved by the methods described in the manuscript. The following are required major compulsory revisions to improve the manuscript.

Abstract-
• Statement that the educational interventions were to increase research activity in Pacific Islands, belongs in the background section not in the methods. Methods section needs to expand and include methods of analysis.
• Last sentence in conclusions belong in the introduction, not in the conclusion.

Introduction-
• Last sentence of introduction paragraph is vague – needs to be more specific than ‘due to a multitude of barriers’. There are specific barriers in sentence 2 of the following paragraph, can they be linked?
• Need to use consistent language – for example sentence 2 in paragraph 3 uses the term ‘program’, but sentences 3 and 4 use ‘intervention’

Materials and Methods
• This section describes the selection process for workshop participants and a background to the research capacity strengthening program – it would be better placed in the introductions section of the manuscript. There is no description of the establishment of the overall program itself, that is, what is the background of the BRRACAP study, and who are the involved (and why) other than the list of key stakeholders. Please provide more detail about this.
Data Collection
• The description under the subheadings ‘questionnaire’ and ‘interviewer-administered questionnaire’ seem very similar. There needs to be a clear articulation about how these are different – both methodologically and the type of data collected.

Research Workshop
• There is no description under the sub-heading ‘research workshop’ of where the workshop was actually conducted. This is important given that there were participants from 6 nations involved. Was it conducted in an ‘environment’ similar to that experienced in participants’ day-to-day clinical work with the challenges of limited infrastructure and resources of a LMIC or was it conducted in an ‘environment’ quite different to that experienced in participants’ day-to-day clinical work with less infrastructure and resource constraints? This sub-heading should be in the introduction, because it describes the program, not the methods used to produce results presented in the results section.

Research and Group Mentoring
• What mechanisms were put in place for mentors who had not worked in the Pacific to ensure appropriate mentorship?
• These sections should be in the introduction because it describes the program, not the methods used to produce results presented in the results section.

Pre-Test and Post-Test
• A statement that pre and post test questionnaires were similar, but appendix 2 is labelled Pre and Post Test Questionnaire. The title of appendix 2 indicates that they are the same – this needs to be clarified.

Results
• It is not obvious what results come from what data collection method ie the methods outline ‘questionnaires’ ‘interviewer-administered questionnaire’ ‘focus group’ and ‘pre and post test’ – but it is not clear what results come from what data collection method.

• Results presented are not consistent with the questions in the ‘Pre and Post Questionnaire’ in appendix 2. Results appear to be baseline results from the pre-workshop questionnaire although the actual questionnaire is not attached.

• Table 1 describes the characteristics of the participants, however the ‘primary role’ section is not correct. The cumulative total is 92, it should be 28. Logically a participant can only have a single ‘primary role’.

Discussion
This section could be improved with a section dedicated to discussing (i) the results (as presented in the results section) and (ii) a section dedicated to discussing the actual program itself. At the moment these are intertwined. This makes reading the paper challenging. Other specifics include:
• Need for precise sentences for example in fourth paragraph there is a statement that no encouragement or support, but the same sentence states that 25% had access to an experienced researcher. Identifying the country of these 25% would have been useful information i.e. are all 25% in one or two countries, meaning that participants from some countries have no access to experienced researchers?

• Table 6 presented data that 25% of participants were not interested in research. This is a major concern if a quarter of the ‘hand-picked’ participants are not interested in research but are included in a multi-country research capacity strengthening workshop and will receive mentor support from international researchers. This needs to be discussed.

• The last sentence of the last paragraph seems contradictory to the sentence immediately preceding it. i.e. if email and online monitoring is successful (that require the internet), then how is this different to social media that also requires internet?

• The first two paragraphs of the conclusion do not belong in the conclusion – rather they belong in the discussion section (specifically in section (ii) dedicated to program itself).

• There is no discussion about Pacific Research Methodologies or Pacific Research Ethics in the manuscript– and how there were utilised and incorporated into the capacity building program. This seems central to strengthening capacity across very diverse social, cultural, language, historical, axiological, ontological and epistemological standpoints of Pacific Islanders in general and Pacific Islands scholars in particular. Highlighting the complexities, and also the opportunities, that this presents to facilitators, scholars and research projects themselves needs to be highlighted to enable lessons to be learned in Pacific Island Countries and Territories and beyond.

I trust the above prove helpful to improve the manuscript in preparation for final submission and publication.

**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'