Author’s response to reviews

Title: Ethical challenges related to elder care. High level decision-makers experiences

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Dear Samia Hurst and Rudolf H ter Meulen,
Thank you for your valuable comments concerning our Manuscript. Please, read the comments below, which we hope clarifies your questions. Page numbers are cited related to changes in the Manuscript regarding your questions.

Comments to Samia Hurst:
1a). You suggested further clarification about the questions asked and the follow up questions.
Changes are made at page 6, line 12-13 and 17-18.

The HDMs were invited to narrate about ethically difficult situations by asking "Please tell me about one or more ethically difficult situations regarding elder care that you have experienced in your position. They were given a possibility to talk about what was important to them and the follow-up questions were: "Tell me more about that" or "What do you mean by that?".

1b). You questioned the sampling that we described "randomly" in relation to this method.
Changes are made at page 5, line 19-21.

I am sorry that we have used the expression "random sample" since it is not a proper approach when using a phenomenological hermeneutic method. It can mislead you to think of an quantitative approach. We have rewritten that text.

2. You asked for more clarification of the relational ethic perspective.
Changes are made at page 4, line 10-22.

You are right, that the HDMs are not in a direct relation to the older adults. But in the HDMs' ethical reasoning they stress bad relations that the older adults are and can be in. The ethics is not only concerning action perspectives but also includes relational ethics i.e. it says for example something about how the relation is, how a person experience himself or the feelings that are involved.

Changes are also made at page 8, line 2.

3. You asked for the most important implications of the findings.
Changes are made at page 3, line 4-14.
Minor essential revisions
1. The langue has been edited.

2. Since this method aims to reveal the phenomena of the text and is not aiming to search for differences between groups or individuals a gender perspective was not searched for. However, if for example a gender difference had arisen from the text, then it would have been of interest throughout the process to try to confirm it.

3. A large amount of the elder care is provided by family members, which indeed is true. At page 16 in the discussion it is emphasized that in particular the spouses already are taken a heavy responsibility.

4. After discussion with our langue reviser, we think that it is appropriate to use the word justness.

Comments to Rudolf H ter Meulen
1). You state that this article promises to give insight into the ethical reasoning of the HDMs but the results only show the feelings of the HDMs as a result of dealing with ethical challenges. Further, you say that there are no insights in the ethical decisions that are in fact taken or insight to the way they are taking these decisions.

The aim was to illuminate the HDMs' experiences of the meaning of being in ethically difficult situations. We saw that the interview text made it possible to use a phenomenological-hermeneutical method and by that to grasp the HDMs lived experiences. The naive reading showed the direction for the structure analysis i.e. towards ethical dilemmas and the meaning of being in them. This means that even if other aspects would have been interesting to reveal, we have to present the results that we could validate throughout the whole analysis.

2). You state that the action and relational perspectives are not coming back in the discussion. We have now made more clarification of the theory since the other referee also requested it. Please see the new text.

Changes are made at page 4, line 10-22.

3). You state that a second serious comment is that it is not clear in which way the responses by the HDMs, their feelings of loneliness differs from what is typical for high level decision-makers.

In this study the purpose was to give an insight to HDMs meaning of being in ethical difficulties related to elder care and to present a view of that. It would have been a strength to discuss the specific results such as feeling of inadequacy and loneliness in association to other high level managers. But due to the richness of this material including both dilemmas and the meaning of being in such situations we felt that it would be of interest to show broad spectra at first. In this first phase we have used an inductive approach. In a next phase we can go further and illuminate specific results i.e. we can use a deductive approach and for example try to validate the phenomena of trust and its' connection to power. This method gives an opportunity to go from the whole to the parts and from the parts to the whole (hermeneutic circle).

4). You are asking for the independent variable and for co-founding factors.

Since we have used a qualitative method we have not used such concepts as independent variables or the word co-founding factor. However, in qualitative research critical considerations have to be made (Lindseth & Norberg 2004). When we are performing a phenomenological hermeneutical interpretation, our aim is to disclose truths about the essential meaning of being in the life world. We cannot expect to find the single truth or the whole truth. We search for possible meanings in a continuous process. The truth is hidden in front of the text, when the interpreters meet the text. We are searching for ontological meaning. By that we want true narratives i.e. we want the informants to talk truthfully about their lived experiences. Sometimes they may say that they don't remember or doesn't understand the meaning of the question. Maybe they don't want to, do not dare to tell or they may not find the right words to express their lived experiences. To conduct an interview is a delicate task since the interviewer must create a permissive climate, where the informants feel free to relay. There is always a risk of misunderstanding, something that related to our pre-understanding both for both parties involved. Skilful interviewers check their understanding during the interview.

In order to have as truthful interpretations of the text as possible the process of interpretation must be strict. The internal consistency of the interpretations and the plausibility in relation to competing interpretations should be considered. Finally, this means that there are several factors to be considerate even though they
You state that in the conclusion the authors point out the important contribution of organisational ethics. You are highlighting the need to more explicit to emphasize the need for organisational ethics and instead of leaving the decision to one person. You are indeed right. However, we think that our text at page 21, line 17-23 indicate this problem and the HDMs responsibility.

You state that the authors include some existential and hermeneutic ethics on page 18-19 and you ask how it is related to the organisational approach. The ethics as we see it, deal with existential questions i.e. it concerns questions of right and good such as what should I do? what is the best to do? am I a good physician, nurse or high level decision-maker? These questions mirror our life world i.e. our answers to these questions will say something about our norms and values of life. We mean that you cannot separate between existential and hermeneutical ethics, because the latter give a possibility to interpret the former.

You state that on page 19 that it is said that the action and relational ethics perspectives persists simultaneously and you have not seen anything that confirm that conclusion. The theory of ethics (Lindseth 1992) was probably weakly described and reviewer 1 also had a similar question about these perspectives, which we now hope is clarified at page 4, line 10-22 and page 8, line 4-6.

You are right when you state that the HDMs seem to have no relation with their people in the organisation and how we by that can say that the action and relation ethics perspectives persists at the same time. We use the theory above as a help of illustration and say that these perspectives exist simultaneously since they are close related to each other. Even if the HDMs are not directly involved with the patients or the professionals, they as leaders dislike the bad relationships (not only actions) in the caring situation of the older adults, which they receive reports on. This means that by such reports, the issue come very close to them; they are moved in their feelings. They feel uncertain, are not always sure of the consequences of their decisions i.e. that they will lead to a good care. The HDMs stress that it is difficult to read and hear about something that is close to unethical situations and patient and caregiver relations in elder care. Therefore, we think that the relational ethic perspective can be used because it is reasonable to believe that the HDMs deal with the question "Am I a good HDM, how can I be a good HDM? how do I fulfil my role?" They are directly involved, in that they are individually moved by their feelings. Therefore, we think that this theory with its' two perspectives can be helpful to use. Ethics concerns all people, the caregivers and also the HDMs.

You state that it seems as if the managers have no relation to the others in the organisation, which is revealed in this study. From our results it is concluded that structures that ensure ethical discussions within the system is necessary. Please see, page 20, line 17-21.

This study was designed with the aim to illuminate lived experiences. This analysis is developed for such aims (Lindseth & Norberg 2004). However, you never know before you have made the naive reading of the text if this analysis is possible to perform. If the text more consists of descriptions than lived experiences, than you have to chose for example latent content analysis. Our text was very rich, detailed and consisted of many thoughts and feelings and that is why we cold use a phenomenological hermeneutic method. This method means to grasp the utterance meaning.

References


Best regards