Reviewer's report

Title: Competency, confidence and conflicting evidence: key issues affecting health visitors’ use of research evidence in practice

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Reviewer: carolyn hicks

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This is a very interesting study, of potential use to policy makers. It is well written and well informed. However, I think it would have far more value if it was written for a health visitors’ journal because the key point that jumps out to me is the urgent need to have more readily available already-evaluated research for this professional group, perhaps in the form of clearer policy, recommendations and guidelines.

I have one or two concerns about the report as it stands. More information needs to be supplied about the development of the questionnaire, in particular, how construct/content validity and reliability were considered. A more detailed description of the questionnaire would also be valuable, so that the reader could identify how the themes were distilled, which research gave rise to each theme, how many questions were included, how the non-Likert questions were answered etc. Some form of rating of the value the respondents placed on each of their information sources would have been relevant, to assess credibility weightings (i.e. how much importance the respondents placed on different sources of information, different formats etc).

The biographical details should be considered in the light of national information, to assess how far the respondents were representative of HVs as a whole. The responses to the questions about barriers and facilitators are so low that I would question the trustworthiness of the data in these sections. However, it is interesting that time is considered to be the main problem, yet later on, the facilitators were considered to be the development of research skills. This would accord with existing evidence which suggests that HCPs always cite time constraints as the major barrier to EBM when asked in an open manner, but when asked using more opaque methods, the main barrier is seen to be lack of research skills. However, information on how this question was asked and answered would be very useful here. I also think that some analysis of the data relating reported confidence about using the evidence to educational level, CPD courses in research methods etc would be useful. Other research suggests that the more recent the research skills training, the more confident the respondent is to use research. Certainly, with such a good response, some analysis of the data by biodetails/subgroups would be interesting.

The discussion takes account of the findings, but I think the major - and most concerning - result is the variety of sources being used, often with very little confidence, and the heavy reliance on the popular media. It seems to me that HV
is desperately in need of a constant stream of already-appraised research to keep HVs well-informed and up-to-date. For me, this is the key finding of the project and one that needs highlighting at policy-making level.

Therefore, in conclusion, I think that this project has a very important message, but one that might be better delivered in a journal that is regularly read by HVs and their policy-makers. Contextualising it as evidence for a new paradigm in evidence-based health visiting, together with suggestions for how this information might be most usefully and effectively disseminated to HVs would have great impact.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**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.