Author's response to reviews

Title: Paucity of qualitative research in general medical and health services and policy research journals: Analysis of publication rates

Authors:

Anna R Gagliardi (anna.gagliardi@uhnresearch.ca)
Mark J Dobrow (mark.dobrow@utoronto.ca)

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Author's response to reviews: see over
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Jenny Leigh
c/o Dr. Carmel Martin
BMC Health Services Research

RE: MS 9728703804615106 – Paucity of qualitative research in general medical and health services and policy research journals: Analysis of publication rates

Dear Editor:

Many thanks for reviewing the above-named manuscript. We have addressed all recommended compulsory and discretionary revisions and feel the manuscript has been much improved based on this thoughtful feedback. Following is a summary of how we addressed each comment, and the accompanying manuscript highlights these edits using the track changes feature.

Note that in addition to addressing reviewer recommendations, we also included an Acknowledgement section as was requested by the Editor.

Best regards,

Anna Gagliardi, PhD
CIHR New Investigator in Knowledge Translation
Assistant Professor, Departments of Surgery and Health Policy, Management and Evaluation, and Institute of Medical Science, Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto
Affiliate Scientist, Toronto General Research Institute and
Chair, Minimal Risk, University Health Network Research Ethics Board
200 Elizabeth Street, 13EN-235
Toronto ON M5G2C4
TEL 416.340.4800 x6642
FAX 416.340.4814
anna.gagliardi@uhnresearch.ca
**REVIEWER: Joan Eakin**
Refer to all possible units of analysis that can be studied through qualitative methodology (behavior, practices, ideology, texts, social influence/power) although this is likely irrelevant to the study at hand...might be useful to include in the description of what qualitative approaches can take on for the benefit of readers

Done, we expanded our definition of health services research to include these concepts if they had not already been mentioned (Methods, Data collection, p 5)

Expand discussion of implications associated with findings, in particular:
- Is qualitative health services research being published elsewhere, ie specialty journals, and why, and what role does the researcher play in publication distribution?

   Done (Discussion, p 9)

- To gain more insight into publication rates interview editors to understand how they handle qualitative research

   Done (Discussion, p 9)

- Explore scientific/knowledge issues that influence whether/how different professionals consider/use qualitative research

   Done (Discussion, p 8)

**REVIEWER: Ann McKibbon**
Refer to published search hedges for qualitative studies in MEDLINE (Wong et al), although the results would likely be identical if they had used these filters or not

Done (Methods, Data collection, p 4)

Refer to CMAJ and BMJ since these are the proper journal titles

Done (Methods p 5, Results p 6)

**REVIEWER: Kevin Pottie**
Discuss the factors that influence whether general medical journals publish qualitative research, for example BMJ appears to have many qualitative articles at one point in time

Done (Discussion, p 9)
REVIEWER: Jonathan DeShazo
Refer to Weiner paper and compare/contrast that study with our study

Done, we now cite the Weiner paper and explain how the two studies differ (Discussion p 8 to 9)

In Methods include more details about:
• number of articles found in MEDLINE search, and those included and excluded

While we could report the total number of articles identified by the MEDLINE search this would include editorials and commentaries, etc. Instead we already report the number of qualitative and non-qualitative research studies published in the included journals in Table 3 and Table 4

• clarify sampling…what does cumulative mean?

Done (Methods p 4)

• inter-rater reliability for article selection

What is important in both systematic reviews and qualitative research is not the degree to which two independent selectors/analyzers agree, but that the methods are comprehensive and result in as accurate an outcome as possible. For this reason, each of the two co-authors independently selected eligible titles/abstracts, and all of these were retrieved whether there was agreement or not, then the research associate retrieved all selected items in full text, and for those which had been chosen by only one individual, she confirmed whether they met the eligibility criteria. This is explained in Methods under Data collection on p 5 so we have chosen not to report inter-rater reliability.

• validation statistics

Since we used the very same process for comparing the number of qualitative articles identified through MEDLINE and through tables of contents searching, we also do not report validation statistics.

• analysis of trends over time

We did not statistically analyze trends over time. This study was meant to be exploratory in nature, and provide a simple snap shot of how many qualitative articles had been published. The data was consistent over time so in fact no statistical analysis was necessary. We now explicitly state that data were scanned to identify changes but that we did not statistically analyze trends (Methods, Data analysis, p 6)

There is room for improvement in the Discussion. In particular the last paragraph is most germane but there is much left untouched. When possible, instead of “some might suggest”, offer a citation.
Without specific prompts it is unclear how to improve the Discussion but hope that incorporation of specific recommendations from the other reviewers has done so. However, we did modify two instances in the last paragraph which previously alluded to the non-specific views of others and now state those ideas as general hypotheses (Discussion p 10).

Discuss more reasons why qualitative research is not published. How do you know that qualitative research isn’t an equal fraction of the submissions? Why not look into publication policies?

Done, as suggested by previous reviewer we note that interviews with editors would explore journal policies and procedures that may impact publishing of qualitative articles, and that interviews with researchers may reveal which journals they are more likely to submit to (Discussion p 9)

Qualitative empirical is an oxymoron…just refer to them as qualitative articles

Done (throughout)