Reviewer's report

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

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Reviewer: Joan E Akin

Reviewer's report:

1. General Comments
In accordance with the guidelines for review I note that the paper has a title that is straightforward and accurate; the authors make it clear what the purpose of the research was; the methods used were appropriate for the purpose, and were well described; the statistical analysis was simple and straightforward (appropriately so for the question at hand); the authors acknowledge other research on this topic and reference relevant literature.

2. Major compulsory Revisions
I feel that the paper made a useful contribution as is, but it could be made much more interesting and thought-provoking through a more fully elaborated discussion of what the findings mean, how they can be accounted for (ie more analytic interpretation). I have expressed some views under ‘discretionary revisions’ below which in my view would make a much stronger/useful paper. But given the objectives of the research project, it is hard for me to propose that extension of the discussion is ‘compulsory’ - it would just make a better paper.

3. Minor Essential Revisions
None

4. Discretionary Revisions
a) The criteria used to identify ‘qualitative’ research did not include (para 2 under Data Collection) all possible units of analysis that can be studied through qualitative methodology (eg no reference to behavior, practices, ideology, texts, social influence/power etc); although this is likely irrelevant to the study at hand (qualitative researchers would not have sent such papers to these journals in the first place), it might be useful to include such research in the description of what qualitative approaches can take on for the benefit of readers.

b) More importantly, I think the article could have gone a bit further beyond the raw empirical findings - the finding that qualitative research is not being published in these journals is useful, but really only a spring board for considering the more important issue of why this is so. The discussion in particular could have been a bit more elaborated. For example, the authors might have considered:

- the possibility that qualitative health services research is being published
elsewhere, in specialty health research journals (eg disability; rehabilitation; psychosocial; pain and chronic illness) and why this might be so.

- the emphasis in this article is on the journal, but what role does the researcher play in the publication distribution – qualitative researchers may not be submitting to these journals in the first place. What do we know about how many qualitative manuscripts are received/turned down?

- in thinking about what more information is needed on this subject, it is ironic that the authors did not recommend some qualitative research: a simple publication count can give only limited insight into the reasons why qualitative research is not getting published here. Interviews with editors for example, analysis of how the journals represent their content/focus, interviews with qualitative health researchers about how they select their publication sites etc would all be useful in uncovering the bases for low publication rates in these particular, and other health research journals.

- the role of paradigmatic and epistemological issues in the lack of uptake of qualitative research: are certain professional/scientific research communities more or less unlikely to be open to the kind of knowledge generated by qualitative methods? Might qualitative research be being published in other sorts of journals not because it cannot make it in the top journals but because qualitative insight is by nature more accessible/understandable/credible to different sorts of practitioners/researchers/policy makers? What are the scientific knowledge issues that influence how qualitative research is (or is not) legitimated?

I am not suggesting that all of this has to be taken up – the point of this paper is obviously to document the paucity in the first place. But I think a broader introductory inquiry into the complex reasons why this might be so is warranted to give the paper more import and interest, and to set the stage for subsequently taking the matter further and deeper.

**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