Reviewer’s report

Title: Reducing the health disparities of Indigenous Australians: Time to change focus

Version: 2 Date: 24 February 2012

Reviewer: Bridget Robson

Reviewer’s report:

The authors are to be commended for examining the privilege/whiteness dimensions of disparities in health and health care between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. This is an often neglected and critical area for examination and critique and the authors rightly argue that progress towards eliminating disparities will be impeded without focusing on those with the power and resources to make systemic changes. This is a very productive topic that is well worth pursuing.

Major compulsory revisions

1. The paper attempts to cover a lot of ground and would benefit from considerable editing down, and increased focus on the aim.

2. The language is rather dense and could be simplified.

3. There needs to be more discussion on how the ‘informal discussions with colleagues’ contributed to the study findings and interpretation. Although the researchers acknowledged that their experiences and knowledge assisted with the data interpretation, some discussion on how this affected the reported findings would add value to the article.

4. The findings from the interviews need to be separated out from the discussion – it is sometimes difficult to tell what came from the interviews and what came from the authors’ reading of the literature. I would prefer the interview findings were left to speak for themselves.

5. I wonder if the findings were forced into the headings of institutional, interpersonal and internalised racism, rather than arising out of an inductive approach? Some of the discussion under the subhead “Interpersonal racism” seems to better fit “institutional racism”.

6. The issues highlighted under the subheading internalised racism are important but I would argue against attributing them to internalised racism. My understanding of internalised racism aligns with the definition presented on page 32 of the manuscript - “Acceptance of attitudes, beliefs or ideologies among members of stigmatised ethnic/racial groups about the inferiority of one’s own ethnic/racial group” (see Paradies, Harris, Anderson 2008, The Impact of Racism on Indigenous Health in Australia and Aotearoa: Towards a Research Agenda.” page.vi.). I don't think that “Indigenous patients perceptions that health
care practices are racist even when not' (p.15) is a manifestation of 'internalised racism' but may be a reflection of collective and individual experiences. This is also a tricky area to explore from interviews with non-Indigenous health professionals. Perhaps a tighter focus on interrogating 'whiteness' would keep the authors on safer ground.

General comment

As the article currently stands, there are some issues that require major revision. However, the study could provide an important contribution to the literature on reducing health disparities. A more concise article, with more results reported from the interviews (not many quotes are reported), and a clear distinction between the findings from the interviews and the discussion related to the literature, would improve the article. I would encourage the authors to keep working on the article to achieve a clearer focus on and resubmit.

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.