Author's response to reviews

Title: Networking between community health programs: effectiveness, barriers and enablers

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Sir/Madam,

This research is perhaps not typical but is equally very important as networks in Public health have become central in allowing smaller organisations to function in an increasingly complicated health environment. It is extremely difficult for smaller health and development programs to exist in isolation from others. However, little is understood about networks in community health and what helps them form, sustain and grow. Given the ubiquity of networks in health we need to better understand how to facilitate them and maximise their input.

This research article is detailed and largely descriptive. However, it was clear to the authors that understanding such complicated social networks required a qualitative and descriptive approach.

On the advice of the editorial team we have referred to and utilised the RATS guidelines for qualitative research** in writing up the paper and we believe it adheres to the relevant criteria as outlined on the website:

We have gone through the RATS check list to make sure the paper conforms and we believe it does. In order to conserve words we have limited the discussion around some of the points in the RATS criteria. Further details, such as access to the survey form, can be provided to the reviewers or readers upon request. Alternatively more details on particular aspects can be included on the advice of the reviewers.

The methods section of the paper has been rewritten to incorporate more detail and a clearer description of the approach taken to this qualitative research. I have included a more detailed description of the participant selection process, details around transcription, description of analysis, and particulars on how the data was synthesised.

I have also added to the Discussion section in order to explain the different methods and their limitations.

The finding we believe are very important in showing that informal networking between NGOs who are working in health can generate resources and improve program impact. The finding also demonstrate that effective networks often require external brokerage to intentionally guide network formation and growth. Building a network requires certain enabling factors including homophily, relationships, geographical location and mission. Barriers that impede network formation include a lack of funding, poor communication, limited time and human resources. Self-interest whereby members sought funds and credibility enticed more members but limited the extent of participation.

We think that these findings are important to assist other health NGOs explore how to maximise their performance through networks and collaboration.

Yours sincerely,

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