Author's response to reviews

Title: It's all about relationships: A qualitative study of health researchers' perspectives of conducting interdisciplinary health research

Authors:

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Author's response to reviews: see over
April 2, 2008

Dear Dr. Norton:

Please find the enclosed revised article entitled, “It’s all about relationships”: A qualitative study of health researchers’ perspectives of conducting interdisciplinary health research.” Attached to this letter is a detailed account of how we have responded to each of the reviewer’s comments.

If you have any questions about this submission, please do not hesitate to contact me at 905-522-1155 ext. 34919 or at nairk@mcmaster.ca. Thank-you for your consideration of this submission.

Sincerely,

Kalpana Nair, MEd MSc on behalf of

Lisa Dolovich, BScPhm PharmD MSc
Kevin Brazil, PhD
Parminder Raina, PhD

Father Sean O’Sullivan Research Centre, St. Joseph’s Healthcare, Hamilton • Faculty of Health Sciences, McMaster University
Reviewer #1: Sara Shaw

MAJOR REVISIONS
1) The section on sampling and data collection still needs work. I am unsure why authors have chosen to separate information on sampling across pp2 7 and 8. It would make more sense to the reader if information about inclusion criteria, generating lists and sampling approaches were together. The suggestion that the study investigators ‘generated a small list of possible participants’ sounds rather parochial (did this actually involve a systematic search of the literature and/or was it about identifying people already known to the authors?) and does not relate well to the rather complicated (and still unclear) description of sampling given on the subsequent page. Authors need to be much clearer throughout this section about what they did and why.
   - We have modified the sampling and data collection section in the following ways:
     - As suggested by the reviewer, all sampling information is now together in one paragraph
     - The use of “generating a small list of possible participants” is in keeping with sampling when conducting key informant interviews and we have referenced this statement (see Gilchrist 1999).
     - We have also provided referencing for our use of multiple sampling strategies (see Patton 2002). This approach to sampling is common in qualitative studies where the purpose is the inclusion of information-rich cases and multiple methods are typically needed to ensure that there is both breadth and depth within the participant group.
     - This section has been read and edited for clarity, and we hope that the provision of references imparts ‘why we did what we did’.

MINOR REVISIONS (ESSENTIAL)
2) P5, para 2 – The review of the literature in the background section would read much better if authors pulled out the key points across the literature cited (rather than providing a list of authors), allowing readers to more easily gain an overall picture of the ID landscape. Also who is Giacomini referring to as feeling compelled?
   - The review of the literature in the background section has been rewritten so that it reads as a broader overview of key themes and ideas that have come from this literature.
   - Giacomini was referring to researchers and this has been made more clear, as follows: “The push for involvement in interdisciplinary research has left some researchers feeling compelled…..”

3) P6 – is this really about ‘documenting the difficulties’ or more about the nature and realities of ID research? Also I’m not sure that the phrase ‘a detailed and broad examination’ makes good sense.
   - Excellent points. The phrase ‘document the difficulties’ has been changed to ‘the nature and realities of interdisciplinary research’ as suggested by the reviewer. In the next sentence, we have deleted the words ‘a detailed and broad examination’ and simply left the word ‘examination’.

4) P6, last sentence – is the larger study ‘examining evaluation’ or is it an evaluation of ID health research?
   - The larger study is seeking to examine how the interdisciplinary component of health research is evaluated. In an effort to clarify this, we have modified this statement as follows: “This study was the first phase of a larger study examining evaluation of the interdisciplinary component of health research….”
5) P8, top para – Why not be clear about numbers here? E.g. of the 20 people invited to participate, 19 agreed and one declined due to scheduling conflicts. Similarly on the page before, it would help to be clear about how many participants within the sample had worked with other participants.
   ▪ We have changed the statement at the beginning of the Results section to read as suggested by the reviewer. We have also deleted the following statement that was in the Sampling and Data Collection Section of the Methods: “ Almost all those invited to participate agreed to participate with the exception of one person who had scheduling conflicts”, as this was repetitive.
   ▪ Unfortunately, it is not known how many of the study participants had worked with other study participants as this was not specifically probed during the interview. Information that some participants had worked with others was only known if participants mentioned specific researchers during their interview. This statement has been modified to state: “…there were participants in this sample who indicated in their interview that they had worked with other participants”, in the hopes that this modification offers more clarity.

6) P9, final para – take out ‘interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed’ – this has already been stated in the para above.
   ▪ This statement has been deleted.

7) P12, first para – Table 1 is a welcome addition but it might be more useful to sort the table according to one of the headers so readers can easily gain a sense of the characteristics. In the text, authors should simply draw readers’ attention to the breadth of disciplines within the table rather than repeating the list. Authors might also like to reflect on the limitations of their sample in relation to the level of involvement in both research and ID studies and the lack of any junior researchers.
   ▪ We have deleted the text at the beginning of the results section that described the primary discipline of study participants.
   ▪ This table had been constructed so that readers could easily find the characteristics of participants by their ID number. However, as suggested by the reviewer we have now changed this so that it is grouped by participant discipline.
   ▪ We like the suggestion to mention sample composition as a limitation and have added this statement into the final paragraph of the Discussion section that is focused on study limitations: “This study sample was also comprised of researchers more seasoned in the conduct of interdisciplinary health research, despite efforts to recruit junior investigators. As a result, the transferability of findings may be limited.”

8) p13 second para – the second sentence is not clear and needs rewriting.
   ▪ We thank the reviewer for noting this lack of clarity. We have modified this sentence to state: “It appeared that prior experience with different disciplines working together mitigated the potential for disciplinary division within the research team.”

9) p14, final para – as far as I can tell, taken together, the four subthemes do not ‘offer a picture of how interdisciplinary research was conceptualised’.
   ▪ This point has been noted. We have changed the word “conceptualized” to “experienced” as this word better captures the intent of this sentence.

10) p18, first para – This doesn’t really make sense -do authors really mean culminate? Second quote – delete ‘it’ and include [everyone taking part in….]
   ▪ We appreciate the reviewer bringing this to our attention. The word culminate was actually
intended to be the word ‘cultivate’. This change has been made and the second quote has been changed as per suggestion.

11) p21, ID success – have challenges been identified from the data alongside strategies, or from elsewhere? Strategies in Table 2 do not really read as strategies and remain uninformative (as before)
  ▪ The intent of this section really is to convey in a succinct format the main challenges and possible solutions for these challenges that participants in this study raised regarding conducting interdisciplinary health research. We feel that this is an important part of this study as the ideas raised by participants could potentially be useful for other researchers conducting interdisciplinary research. In order to address the concerns raised by the reviewer, we have done the following:
    o We have modified the language in this section of the text and in Table 2 such that the word “strategies” has been changed to the words “possible solutions” as follows: “Participants in this study offered possible solutions to three key challenges of interdisciplinary health research that were consistently raised during the interviews: 1) not understanding what interdisciplinarity research is really about; 2) varying personalities and viewpoints; and 3) marginality and power dynamics.
    o In order to convey that these solutions were generated by participants regarding challenges they raised, the second sentence of this section reads as follows: “Ideas for maximizing the potential benefits of interdisciplinary research emerged from the interview discussions and are summarized in Table 2”.
    o We have changed some of the wording in the Solutions column, so that these ideas could be more easily operationalized.

12) p24 second para – delete ‘that may have been perceived as “soft research”’
  ▪ Good point. This phrase has been deleted.

13) There are a number of minor errors throughout (e.g. p13, quote – delete ‘a’ at the start; p15, first para – ‘but (not and) was inherent’; numbers less than 11 should be written out in full throughout the paper). Authors also have a tendency to use ‘this’ throughout the paper and need to go through the paper and clarify what ‘this’ means (e.g. p20 ‘This was seen as both a necessity but also a frustration as sometimes the short time frame of grants did not allow for this….. For some, the length of this process…’ p25 ‘this provides a position whereby…’).
  ▪ This attention to detail is appreciated. The errors have been corrected.
  ▪ We have gone through the entire manuscript and clarified all uses of the word “this”, including those noted above.

DISCRETIONARY REVISIONS
14) p13, first para – it might be useful to specify what authors mean by ‘written about’ – are they referring to interviewees who have undertaken and published academic work about ID research?
  ▪ Yes, we are referring to participations who have engaged in and published articles about their experiences or perceptions of doing interdisciplinary research. We have changed this statement to read: “Three participants had conducted and published articles in academic journals about their experiences or perceptions of doing interdisciplinary research.”

15) p17, second para – ‘less conscious’ than what?
  ▪ This is a good observation. This sentence has been reworded to state: “The opportunity for exposure to new methods or theories was cited by some participants.”

16) p24 first para – do authors really mean ‘unruly’?
- We have changed the word unruly to “difficult”.

17) p25 conclusion -do authors really mean ‘suspect’? ID research does not come across this way from their findings
- We appreciate this query. We have deleted the word ‘suspect’ and have changed the end of this sentence as follows: Unfortunately, the pressured funding climate and sometimes one-dimensional approach towards promotion in academia, has created an atmosphere that has made involvement in interdisciplinary research less desirable, particularly early in one’s career.

18) In several places, authors use ‘As well…’ at the start of a sentence. It does not read very well and could be replaced by e.g. ‘In addition…’ or ‘Furthermore…”
- Excellent point. The manuscript has been reread and in these instances, the words ‘In addition’ or ‘Furthermore’ have been inserted instead of ‘As well’.

Reviewer #2: Kevin Dew
The authors have appropriately responded to all my suggestions. Additional material has been added on relevant literature, sampling procedures and the process of data analysis. I hope the authors think this has enhanced their paper it certainly has in my opinion.
I spotted one typo on pg 20 "discipline that the come from" should be "discipline that they come from"
- We appreciate the reviewer catching this typo – it has been corrected.