Reviewer's report

Title: Researching the mental health needs of hard-to-reach groups: managing multiple sources of evidence.

Version: 1 Date: 13 August 2009

Reviewer: Donald E Nease

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Major Compulsory Revisions
1. The authors done an excellent job of explaining their approach to "the methodological challenges inherent in managing multiple and diverse sources of evidence..." They also make a good case up front for why they adopted such a comprehensive approach, which I agree with. However, what seems lacking is a clear description of what emerged from their approach that might have otherwise been overlooked. What emerged that challenged the assumptions of the research team? Concrete examples of such findings would help to answer the bottom line question of whether this exhaustive approach is necessary?

2. The authors have mostly done an admirable job of walking the tightrope of generally describing their approaches to each domain of inquiry without becoming bogged down in detail. However, some more detail would be quite useful in the area of divergent evidence. How were areas of divergent evidence addressed by the team? Specific examples would be quite helpful to illustrate this process.

3. Stakeholders can be tricky. They can often, especially in the case of disadvantaged groups, act as brokers and filters of information from their communities, effectively censoring information that they deem inappropriate to share with outsiders. Did the study team recognize and address this potential bias in any way?

Minor Essential Revisions
1. The final sentence of the first paragraph under the section "Hard-to-reach groups" is awkwardly phrased. I think the authors mean to state, "...young people in whom eating disorders are reported, rarely present on their own..."

2. Next to the last sentence of paragraph 5 under the section "Gathering evidence", the word "paper" should be plural.

3. Under the same section, in paragraph 6, final sentence, "meet" should read "meets."

Discretionary Revisions
1. Back to the tightrope described above, I found myself wanting to know more about the numbers of interviews, sizes of groups, etc. from the qualitative
inquiries. The authors tantalize us with the fact that it was difficult to recruit some groups, but that's about it. A little more on the sampling size would be useful.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I participated as an external, expert, peer reviewer of the intervention strategies that were developed.