Author's response to reviews

Title: Sampling challenges in a study examining refugee resettlement

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The Editor

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To the Editor,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the reviewers’ comments. We submit our revised manuscript “Sampling challenges in a study examining refugee resettlement” for further consideration.

The intent of this paper is primarily to outline some of the sampling and recruitment challenges encountered when working with four separate and effectively hidden refugee groups, using our experience as to assist others who may be grappling with similar issues. This study is explorative given that no previous comparative studies have been conducted with these groups. In line with the major compulsory revisions suggested by the reviewers, we have rewritten much of the article and added an extra section to assess the sample representativeness as compared with available Census data.

Given the extensive revisions, a track changes version was very difficult to follow and to ensure the revision made sense we needed to accept the changes to finalize the manuscript. Our approach to each reviewer’s comments point by point is detailed below:

Reviewer 1

i. Major revision: In the main text there is too little attention to describing the existing literature on the challenges, the different sampling strategies that have been employed and why snowball sampling was chosen

a. This issue has now been addressed through a major rewrite of the discussion section (p 10-13) with further consideration of different methodological approaches and advantages of mixed method techniques, a brief discussion of different types of probability and purposeful sampling, and difficulties with access and sampling with hidden populations. References to previous literature on the subject have also been included in the sampling strategy section (p 6-7).
ii. Discretionary revision: It would be less confusing if the term ‘link methodology’
was replaced with snowball consistently

a. This has now been done.

iii. Major revision: A good section of the beginning of the paper is devoted to
study design, statistical analyses, instrument and language considerations, which
were not the main aim of the paper. These sections should be shortened
significantly to allow for more detailed discussion of existing literature on
challenges, different sampling strategies that have been employed and why
snowball sampling was chosen

a. Most of this has been addressed in (i) above. The section on instruments and
language considerations has been shortened and details included under study
design and instruments (p 5).

iv. Minor revision: Any consideration of statistical analyses should include a
sample size calculation

a. Our study was primarily exploratory rather than hypothesis testing, so sample
size was based around logistic considerations taking into account community
sizes and feasibility given the lack of information about these populations and
differences between them. The aim was to attempt to recruit approximately 50
people from each group, to provide sufficient data for basic descriptive statistical
analysis and comparison. This is now mentioned on p 7.

v. Major revision: It is not clear by what means the authors selected the studies
for inclusion in Table 1. Did they limit their search to studies including refugees
from Iraq and Afghanistan: Did they conduct a systematic review of the
literature? What databases were searched? We are left wondering what others
have written about the subject and alternative sampling strategies employed.

a. Discussion of previous studies with groups from Afghanistan and the Middle
East has now been moved to the Discussion section (p 13-14) and the table
renumbered as Table 4. Studies for inclusion were selected following a
systematic literature review of articles that included participants from these target
regions now living in western countries. Google Scholar, ProQuest and PubMed
databases were used to search for relevant articles at the time the study
proposal was first developed. We were particularly interested to learn how others
had approached sampling for these specific groups, given some of the difficulties
with identification of former refugees from these regions and issues of cultural
awareness and language.

vi. A large part of the paper is also devoted to a detailed description of the
demographic profile of the participants in both countries and how they compare.
The authors conclude (p 11) that they obtained a ‘cross-sectional representation
of the population’. This claim is unfounded until a comparison can be made
against the demographic profile of populations in Australia and NZ from which
the sample is drawn. Some key demographic data (age, sex, education etc)
should be compared with the study sample to assess representativeness.

a. A separate section dealing with the representativeness of our sample as
compared with 2006 Census data for WA has been inserted on p 9 & (new)
Table 3. Due to the problem of Kurdish ethnicity being ‘hidden’ in Census and Immigration data, we included data from Iran- and Iraq-born populations, but discussed the limitations of this. Data were compared on gender, age, religion, English language, post-school qualifications and arrival pre or post-1996. The construction of a ‘tentative map’ of community demographics in consultation with professionals and community members to gauge representativeness, as described in the literature, was also mentioned.

vii. Minor revision: It seems a little tenuous to suggest that there is an association between length of time in Australia and diminishing hospitality by refugees. In Table 2 (renumbered as Table 1) it states that there were no established relationships in Perth prior to the study, whereas in NZ they did. This is also a likely explanation.

a. We agree that this could be an explanation, although most participants in NZ were also unknown to us prior to the study. We have expanded our discussion of possible explanations, including adding the explanation suggested by the reviewer (p 17).

viii. I believe the authors have not provided enough evidence to support the representativeness of their sample, otherwise, there is acknowledgment of the limitations of the snowball method

a. This issue has been addressed under point (vi) above

ix. More emphasis in the text needs to be devoted to the issue of sampling (as distinct from study design) to accurately reflect the title and abstract

a. This has now been addressed as part of the rewrite of the paper.

Reviewer 2

Major compulsory revisions:

i. The Discussion section only refers to articles shown in Table 1 (now renumbered as Table 4). The discussion lacks a description of the findings/methodological challenges in relation to previous published literature eg Ellis (2007), Guerin & Guerin (2007), Potocky-Tripodi (2000), Bloch (2007).

a. This issue was also raised by Reviewer 1 and has been dealt with by the rewrite of the paper. References to all these papers, as well as several others have been made throughout the paper. The article by Bloch had been already included as Ref 10 in the original manuscript.

ii. The paper fails to mention alternative non-probabilistic sampling strategies

a. A brief discussion of alternative sampling methods had been included p 11-12. However, this section has now been expanded.

iii. It is important to clarify in the discussion section that the sampling method used does not aim to obtain a true ‘representative’ sample

a. This point has been made on p 6-7, but a new section discussing representativeness of our sample compared with Census data has also been added on p 9-10.

Minor essential revisions:
iv. The first paragraph referring to refugees under the UNHCR states 'many will eventually be resettled'. This is inaccurate as only 1% are actually resettled.

a. This paragraph has been reworded to better reflect this reality (p 4).

v. Instruments – when stating that instruments used with comparable cultural groups have been shown to be valid and reliable, references should be added.

a. The section dealing with instruments and language considerations has been shortened considerably, and this comment has now been deleted. A reference to our published study about instrument selection has been added.

vi. Language considerations and interview process – How often were interpreters/cross cultural workers required? How many questionnaires were administered to participants and how many were self completed?

a. A comment explaining that almost 90% of questionnaires were self completed, and that almost no Australian Kurds or NZ Afghans required assistance has been added to p 5.

vii. Participants – the ‘time of arrival’ for selecting participants is quite wide (20 years). A brief explanation of the reasons for using this selection criteria and likely implications on results should be included.

a. Participants settled up to 20 years were included primarily to enable the Kurdish group in Perth to be included, as many of them arrived during the late 1980-1990s. This also allowed us to take a longer term view of resettlement, to assess the experiences of people up to 20 years after arrival, which as far as we are aware has not been examined previously. A comment to this effect has been included on p 6.

viii. Results – two typographical errors in results section ‘Each OF’ and ‘number of years OF schooling’ - have been corrected

ix. References 11 & 15 were two versions of the same paper – Amended

x. What was the response rate for each of the groups?

a. This has now been included in the results section on p 8. We estimated that 65% of NZ Kurds, 85% NZ Afghans and only about 40% for each of the Australian groups chose to participate.

xi. Table 1 (now renumbered as Table 4) – include sample size for Ahmad & Taloyan study (done), move 50 people in outpatient clinic & 50 volunteers to study participants column in Ghazinour study (done), and explain OPD/GP in full for the Gilgen study (done)

Discretionary revision:

xii. The section ‘statistical analysis’ would be better located at the end of the methods section. - Done

We appreciate the reviewers’ careful consideration of this paper and helpful comments and the opportunity to revise it. We believe that this is now a stronger paper and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully
Cheryl Sulaiman-Hill & Sandra Thompson