Reviewer's report

Title: Developing lay health worker policy in South Africa: A qualitative study

Version: 2 Date: 15 January 2012

Reviewer: Rhona Mijumbi

Reviewer's report:

I thank the authors for the work they have continued to put into this paper and of course the earlier research leading up to it. It is a paper that I would very much like to see translated into action especially on the policy making level, it is highlighting very important issues that cannot be ignored anymore.

In fact as I read through it for both the first and second times, I used the lens of a knowledge translation specialist and some of the comments if not all were from how one would use it for purposes of translating into action. And so when a suggestion for rephrasing was made, it was not to change what the authors meant but what the reader would pick up. I see that most of it has not been changed because the authors felt it was not necessary. The paper can be published but it would be sad if it stopped at that.

Response to Authors’ comments

Introduction

Comment 1

"We have reviewed the introduction and we feel that it explains the context and theoretical assumptions of our paper. We therefore feel that it offers an important background. This is particularly important in qualitative studies. We have thus made no changes to the introduction."

The authors feel that an introduction of three pages is appropriate and cannot be summarized further. In fact I agree with them when they say that it is offering an important background to the study, just like introductions do in all studies. It is important as it sets the pace of your paper and once you lose the reader at this point, you might have lost them for good. There is always a lot of information that you feel is good, however who is your target audience? I do hope that they feel the same way for their target audience.

Comment 3

"We do not think that our phrasing suggests that LHW programmes are always driven by task shifting or that LHWs are always engaged in shifted tasks. But we do believe that these programmes are, amongst other things, part of a broader context of task shifting. We have therefore not made any changes to the wording."

My comment did not say that the authors suggested ‘that LHW programmes are
always driven by task shifting or that LHWs are always engaged in shifted tasks.' 
"Lay health work might not NECESSARILY be task-shifting". I used the word 
NECESSARILY twice in the comment and I hope the meaning was not lost along 
the way. And this was drawn from what the quoted sources alluded to. What was 
meant by the sources does not necessarily match what has been said here, but 
in my opinion it is the phrasing. I do understand what they are saying but do the 
quoted sources actually imply the same? Taking the same example I gave of 
Zachariah et al., Zachariah implies a relationship moving from Task-shifting 
towards Lay Health Work, while the author during quoting implies a relationship 
in the opposite direction. It is true it is a broad context but in what relationship? 
Depending on the direction, the message sent out in both scenarios is different, 
and at that point it is no longer about your research alone but it is at the point of 
informing the reader.

Methods

If I read this section and I cannot redesign or replicate the study, I have a 
problem. But when I read it, all the information was there, it is just that we were 
losing the flow. Sub-headings were suggested for the authors to arrange the 
information not to use. However the authors do feel that how it is written is 
appropriate.

Comment 3

Original reviewer comment was "Are the policy activists attached to any 
institution for which representation can be claimed in this paper? Or are they 
individuals with an opinion? If the latter, how do we justify the ones included in 
the sample and not others, since the sampling method did not provide for equal 
probability of inclusion?"

Author response was "This is a qualitative study. The chosen purposive sampling 
method was not meant to be representative or to provide an equal probability of 
inclusion, which is a quantitative standard. As stated in the methods "The 
informants were purposively sampled meaning that they were selected on the 
basis of their involvement and knowledge of the policy making process". In other 
words, our participants were key informants."

The comment was not understood. In no way was it calling for the methods to 
change towards probability etc, it was asking about the policy activists and their 
attachments. It is a qualitative study and that is why it is important for us to 
understand that the said key informants do represent views that are credible. For 
you to say policy activist and I do not have any inclination what kind of people 
they are or their affiliation makes me question whether I should trust their opinion 
or not. It is a qualitative study and so sampling using probability methods is not 
expected and that is the very reason we need you to describe you sample to the 
extent that leaves not doubt. If it was quantitative, the probability sampling would 
leave no doubt in our minds.

The authors could look at this comment again and handle it or respond to it for
what it was.

Comment 5

Validity
"We feel that the reviewer has read this section using quantitative standards which are not in keeping with this qualitative study."

The meaning of validity in research does not vary whether in quantitative or qualitative research, the meaning is not worlds apart as the authors would like to imply. You are describing close to the same thing; in qualitative research you will say that validity will refer to credibility and dependability that the tool who is the person has measured. Several experienced qualitative researchers have referred to this as ‘quality, rigor and trustworthiness’ (Davies and Dodd, 2002; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Mishler, 2000; Seale, 1999; Stenbacka, 2001; Golafshani, 2003), that the study measured what it said it did. Hammersley, 1987 says "An account is valid if it represents accurately those features of the phenomena, that it is intended to describe, explain or theorise."

And so my comments on this have not changed.

Results and Discussion
Again the authors do feel the results and discussion are appropriately presented. My comments on these have not changed.

**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:**

None