Author’s response to reviews

Title: Barriers and recruitment strategies for precarious status migrants in Montreal, Canada

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Reviewer reports:

Pavlina Andreeva-Gateva (Reviewer 1):

This is a paper aiming at describing Barriers and recruitment strategies for precarious status migrants in Montreal, Canada. A mixed sequential design was used to combine qualitative data gathered from members of the research team at a deliberative workshop (n = 16) and in individual interviews (n = 15) with qualitative and quantitative data collected using the conceptual mapping method (n = 10). Authors concluded that sharing the experiences and lessons learned by the research team in this study in Montreal provides a useful working tool for future research projects.

1. The reason why not all 16 participant did not participated in the conceptual mapping method (n=10) needs to be explained. How exactly those 10 participants were chosen?

All the interviewers who attended the reflexive workshop (n = 16) were invited to take part in the conceptual mapping workshop, but only 10 were able to attend. In the text, we have indicated the reason for this attendance rate in light of both internal and external factors affecting the interviewers.
2. In the introduction authors enumerated all items which were further evaluated during the study. In the discussion authors have to clearly state what were the new ideas they subtracted from they study. The recommendations in the Table 3 are applicable to all populations under recruitment, not just for precarious status migrants.

We have pointed out the new ideas emanating from the study at the start of the discussion. In fact, the recommendations, in Table 3, are also applicable to some populations that are difficult to reach, in particular for certain minorities.

3. p. 7 - 447+387 subjects were recruited, but for which purpose? And here may be it would be better to indicate quantitatively the methods of the recruitment. For me the sentence "the initial objective was achieved" is not clear. Which objective was achieved?

The quantitative objective for population-based recruitment (n = 400) was achieved. We have explained the quantitative method we adopted.

4. The background of the interviewers needs to be presented in brief. Their experience as a recruiters? On p.12 they are described as "research assistants". Are those the same subjects as on table 1? Please, unify.

We have standardized the terms in the text and have presented the interviewers’ experience.

5. Please, correct the numbering of the challenges (pp. 14-15)

OK

6. p. 23 - "sharing of common migration experiences was a key factor for recruitment in the present study." and p. 24 - "very diverse levels of education". Those are characteristics of the recruited populations and it will be better to place them on p. 7.
The sharing of common migration experiences between interviewers and the targeted persons was a key factor in recruitment. This was a recruitment strategy that we presented in the discussion. As such, we believe it is relevant to put it on page 27. Regarding the second quote, we have removed it from the discussion.

7. Additional file 1 - please, complete with the other communities, as per p.6 (the footer). There is missing Russian speaking etc. Please, name those communities uniformly through the manuscript.

OK

Lauren Hamel (Reviewer 2): I reviewed the manuscript "Barriers and recruitment strategies for precarious status migrants in Montreal, Canada." I found the manuscript to be very well-written with some interesting findings that will likely help other researchers who want access to this, and other hard-to-reach populations. I can't recommend the paper for publication in its current form, but I have some comments that I think will help the authors get the paper in better shape.

After reading the paper I think I was able to determine the purpose behind this effort. However, I think the "so what" gets lost in the details or even gets stated in a way that the paper loses its effectiveness. As an example, on page 8 the objectives of the study focus on analyzing the strategies and sharing the lessons. If I understand the paper correctly, it seems to me the authors want to determine the effectiveness of the strategies not merely analyze them. I think that's ultimately what the results section tries to do but the pieces of the paper aren't very well connected. The abstract also does this with a statement about analyzing the strategies but not providing a rational for why.

We have now indicated more precisely and clearly the objectives of the study. 1) to analyze the strategies implemented by the research team to respond to the challenges of that recruitment, and assess the effectiveness of those strategies; and 2) to share the lessons learned by the interviewers (interviewers, coordinators, trainees) who recruited migrants, with a view to increasing the representation of precarious status migrants in quantitative healthcare studies.
The methods also lack some clarity. It jumps into a framework and discussing interviewers but who exactly are the interviewers, who are the participants, what is a deliberate workshop, and what is QDA Miner? Similar to my previous comment, there's a certain amount of inferring the reader needs to do to figure out some of these foundational pieces. I think the authors can be a lot more explicit to make their point.

We have clarified these elements by explaining more precisely the tools used for the analysis and the data collection instruments.

I think once the introduction and methods are straightened out the results will fall more naturally from there. I would encourage the authors to make the results and subsequent advice as clear for the reader as possible. If their intent is to truly help other researchers with overcoming barriers to recruitment, then providing detailed and translatable strategies will be critical for the uptake. I think Tables 2 and 3 are a step in the right direction.

We have clarified, after assessing the effectiveness of the strategies, what were the main lessons to be retained by the reader. Further details were added to Tables 2 and 3.

My last comment would be for the authors to take the opportunity in the discussion section to compare and contrast their findings with other findings from similar research efforts; both with this population and other under-studies populations.

We compared the results with groups that are difficult to reach, to identify similarities and differences. However, our comparison group was made up mainly of ethnic minorities that had the greatest number of characteristics in common with the group studied (diversity, cultural adaptation of strategies) and, as such, relevant factors for comparison.

Md Nazmul Karim, MBBS, MPH, M Clin Epi, PhD (Reviewer 3): Thanks for sending the manuscript "Barriers and recruitment strategies for precarious status migrants in Montreal, Canada" for review. This study analysed the recruitment strategies and shared the lessons to increasing precarious status migrants' representation in research. Generally the manuscript is well written. A major strength was the use of mixed sequential design.
The only concern I would raise about the way the conclusion is written. Conclusion should briefly tell, in plain language the take home message driven from the data in this study. The authors preferred to discuss their finding with reference. I would rewrite the conclusion accordingly.

The conclusion section of the abstract should also be amended accordingly.

We have indicated in the conclusion the main message for future studies.