Reviewer's report

Title: Previous experiences and emotional baggage as influences on lifestyle change - a qualitative study of Norwegian Healthy Life Centre participants

Version: 5 Date: 9 April 2015

Reviewer: Robin Ray

Reviewer's report:

Dear Authors

In this age of modern medicine where lifestyle disease is a leading cause of mortality, this paper has the potential to provide insight into important issues relevant to health behavioural change. However, the lack of application of recognized theoretical concepts and models weakens this research and diminishes its ability to inform the readership of this journal.

The following feedback is offered to assist you to improve this paper.

Major compulsory revisions

Abstract: the conclusions offered in the abstract are very general. These could be made more robust by focusing on theoretical connections and the less reported information about childhood experiences.

Background: needs to introduce some of the recognized theory that informs health behaviour.

Methods: line 154. Please clarify what is meant by "addressed by the questions". You may just need to add a couple of words here to make the meaning clear.

Line 162: Given that "personnel working in the Healthy Life Centres helped in the recruiting process", how did you address the conflict of interest? What did these staff do to differentiate between their professional role and being a recruiter?

Lines 215/216: what is meant by the statement about "codes defined the interviewer's experience". This is not usual practice. It either needs to be explained in terms of the rigor of the methodology or omitted.

MindJet mapping - where did these preliminary themes come from? Were they generated externally to the data or did they arise from the data? A further explanation would improve this section.

Results:

Also having a mixture of self referrals and GP referrals has implications for stage of change (Prochaska & Di Clemente) and probable self efficacy (Bandura). The paper would benefit from some analysis of these factors in the light of this theory.

Lines 272 onwards: People's previous experience is a key factor in self efficacy. This section needs to correlate with at least this theory.

Line 287 is a classic example of relapse as described in the Transtheoretical
Model. Also line 294 is an example of the time taken to incorporate changed behaviour - again a recognized factor in the same model.

Theme 2 has further implications for Bandura’s work in the discussion of habits. Negative experiences are known to impact the ability to change and should be recognized here.

Discussion section would be strengthened by the application of theoretical work such as Prochaska and Di Clemente, Bandura, Pender’s Health Promotion model, as well as theory related to psychological stress and health behavioural change.

The following references may be useful.


Minor essential revisions

Results: It appears that participants were mostly female. Were there any differences in results between the gender?

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

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

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I have no competing interests