Author’s response to reviews

Title: "They don't care about us": Older people's experiences of primary healthcare in Cape Town, South Africa

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Response to reviewers:

Catherine Tong, PhD (Reviewer 2): Thank you for responding to all of my questions and concerns. The revisions were nicely done. The methods, in particular, are much more comprehensive.

I only have one final question/concern:

All of the reviewers appear to have raised questions about the 'type' of qualitative study, the qualitative approach and methods used. The authors added in the revised version some references to grounded theory. Why didn't the authors mention grounded theory in the original version?

Typically in a 'grounded theory' study, you see the theory run throughout the paper. There is a theoretical framework or positioning at the outset/in the introduction, there is the grounded theory approach outlined in the methods, and then typically you see the theory and the generation of theory, which is grounded in the data acquired, in the results and discussion. I don't see this 'thread' run throughout the paper. Rather, what I see is a non-categorical qualitative study that employed data collection techniques from the grounded theory tradition. Is this, perhaps, a more accurate description? Either way, I would like the authors to comment on their use of 'grounded theory', when the results have not generated or added to any theory, at least not in an obvious/clearly articulated way.

RESPONSE: Thanks for this question. We actually addressed this question in the response to the third reviewer in our first set of revisions, indicating that we did not apply constructivist...
grounded theory in the strict sense and in the paper we indicated that our approach was “based on” GT. Here is our first explanation below:

“Thanks for this useful feedback. We used a constructivist grounded theory approach but were hesitant to state this as we did not apply it in a strict sense, in that we did not use a process of theoretical sampling during recruitment or continue to carry out research until theoretical saturation was reached. However, we did not start with a particular theoretical framework and rather allowed the data to speak for itself, we used the principals of coding and constant comparison and did add additional probes to flesh out emerging categories in successive focus groups. We have now explained our approach more in the design statement and added citations from the grounded theory literature.”

Nevertheless, we agree that we could bring more clarity to the paper regarding our lack of contribution to theory. We have edited the text to read as follows:

To achieve this goal and allow the ‘voice’ of older persons to be heard in the study, an inductive and exploratory approach was taken to the research based on the qualitative methodology of grounded theory [38, 39] using Charmaz’s constructivist approach [40].

Grounded theory (GT) uses the methods of coding and constant comparison of emerging findings to discover relevant concepts, categories and relationships between them through a theoretical framework that emerges from the research itself through a process of induction [38]. We used elements of this approach for data collection and analysis but did not aim to generate or add to existing theory as such. For practical purposes and because of ethical review board constraints, we also did not employ the GT principal of theoretical sampling.

We hope this addresses your concerns. Thanks!