Reviewer’s report

Title: Balancing the struggle to live with dementia: A systematic meta-synthesis of coping

Version: 1 Date: 09 May 2019

Reviewer: Richard Fortinsky

Reviewer's report:

Strengths of this paper include the importance of the topic, a thorough presentation of all articles included in the systematic review, the methodology which adhered quite well to the PRISMA criteria, and conclusions that were adequately supported by the qualitative analysis.

Several limitations or inadequate explanations are notable:

1. In the methods section, it is unclear what is meant by "pure sample" of persons living with dementia. Does this refer to the type of dementia or to something regarding the sampling procedures used in the studies reviewed?

2. Among exclusion criteria, "mixed sample" was mentioned. It is unclear what this term refers to, so this must be further elaborated.

3. In the section on data abstraction, it is noted that pairs of authors each read and reread one-third of papers. It is unclear how many total authors were engaged in the article reviews, and also why pairs of authors read only a portion of the articles. This section requires greater elaboration and clarification to fully understand the article review process.

4. In the results section, different numbers of articles reviewed are mentioned than in the section on assessment of the quality of studies. The true number must be reconciled and used consistently wherever mentioned in the paper.

5. The data abstraction and synthesis section is quite cursory and provides only a sketch of the steps in this process. Greater elaboration of each step would help strengthen the paper by explaining the multi-step process of data synthesis.

6. Given that some studies included persons with dementia living in private homes and others included persons living in nursing homes or other care facilities, the paper would be strengthened by drawing comparisons between strategies used by persons living in each type of setting. For example, was humor used more commonly in one setting or the other, and what this might mean for potential interventions to help persons with dementia live better lives in the settings where they reside.
7. Even though the number of studies that were longitudinal was quite small, any evaluation of changes over time in strategies would make a new contribution to the literature. Authors should consider commenting on themes found regarding changes over time if at all possible.

**Are the methods appropriate and well described?**  
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Does the work include the necessary controls?**  
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Unable to assess

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?**  
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?**  
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

**Quality of written English**  
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Needs some language corrections before being published

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