Reviewer's report

Title: Understanding recovery in the context of lived experience of personality disorders: a collaborative, qualitative research study

Version: 2 Date: 14 January 2015

Reviewer: Tetsu Hirosawa

Reviewer's report:

Summary: This manuscript addresses an important topic of personality disorders using exploratory, qualitative, interview-based method.

They revealed that key facilitator of recovery are positive personal relationships and wider social interaction. And those are also where the core vulnerabilities of individuals of personality disorders can lie.

I recommend this study since these kinds of data are still rare and, therefore very valuable for the clinical fields. I really hope that further data from various age and various psychotic conditions will be accumulated more and more.

1. Is the question posed by authors well defined?
   Yes.

   #1 Minor Essential Revisions
   Although the question is well defined, redundant description might be potentially confusing.

   For example, the sentence in P6 lines 13 - 16 (“The gaps in the empirical literature identified above are indicative of a need for detailed qualitative research, at an individual experiential level, that addresses the question of whether and how concepts of recovery can be meaningfully applied in the context of personality disorders.”) should be included in the background section.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
   No.

   #2 Major Compulsory Revisions
   Methods section is somewhat confusing due to a lengthy preamble.

   Could you establish an extra “design” sub-section, clearly state the study design and keep the preamble short and simple? (e.g. An exploratory, qualitative, interview-based, assessing patients’ perspectives of recovery in BPD was conducted. The study design was based on….)

   #3 Major Compulsory Revisions
   Although you mentioned as “As is also the case with the work of Castillo, Ramon and Morant, our findings therefore relate to a population that meets service access criteria defined by generic difficulties associated with having a diagnosis
of personality disorder, in contrast to a diagnostically defined population”, you should explicitly describe your inclusion criteria, at least briefly (NOT just citation).

#4 Minor Essential Revisions
What does “[initials]” mean? Were these typos? (e.g P7 lines 7, 8 and 10)

#5 Major Compulsory Revisions
The definition of “service user researcher with lived experience of personality disorder” is not clear. Please specify what kind of person he/she is. (e.g. Researcher who has personality disorder? General people who have personality disorder? )

#6 Major Compulsory Revisions
Some readers (including me) might be less familiar with “thematic analysis (P9, line 20)”. I might be reason why it is hard to understand the table 1 (e.g. why stage 3 and 4 are conducted by two of researchers as distinct from ALL researchers).

Please give a description of this method, at least briefly.

3. Are the data sound?
Yes. However, there are some concerns about data description.

#7 Major Compulsory Revisions
Could you give a short description of interviewees’ socio-demographic and clinical characteristics at the beginning? For example, things like age, gender, marriage status, employment status, treatment, co-morbid diagnoses might be needed.

#8 Major Compulsory Revisions
Figure 2 (and 3) does not make sense by itself.
Please give an additional explanation and, in particular, specify what those symbols means. (e.g, what outward/inward arrows means? what crossover between two circles means? etc.)

#9 Major Compulsory Revisions
Authors stated as “interviewees seemed to be describing a continuous tension within the self between the experiences of an internal and an external world”. However, which part of interviewees’ speech corresponds to it is unclear.

Could you clearly explain how interviewees’ speech leads to such statements?

4. Do the figures appear to be genuine, i.e. without evidence of manipulation?
Yes.

5. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
Yes.

6. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
Partly.

#10 Major Compulsory Revisions
The concerns I pointed out in #9 is the case with following three statements;
“complexity of ambiguous, interrelating and conflicting feelings, thoughts and actions as the individual tries to live in and cope with both worlds”
“feeling alienated by a hostile outside world and needing to isolate oneself within the internal world in order to feel safe”
“experience of receiving a diagnosis of personality disorders that could reinforce a sense of not fitting in with the outside world”
(P25 lines 18-23”)
Please explain which part of interviewees’ speech corresponds to those statements.

#11 Minor Essential Revisions
In “References” section, there is misprint in citation 34(P35 line 3). Correction is needed.

#12 Minor Essential Revisions
Authors mentioned as “What this mainstream understanding of social inclusion does not address is the experience of internal and external worlds, articulated by our interviewees, as in some way like opposing poles of a magnet. (p27 lines 20-22)”
Since opposing poles of magnet tend to attract one another, this sentence does not imply following sentence.

7. Are limitations of work clearly stated?
Yes.

8. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
No.

#13 Minor Essential Revisions
There are no authors’ initials or names in place it should be. (p31 lines 13,15,17,22)

9. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
Yes.

10. Is the writing acceptable?
Yes.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests