Reviewer’s report

Title: Can digital stories go where palliative care research has never gone before? A descriptive qualitative study exploring the application of an emerging public health research method in an Indigenous palliative care context

Version: 0 Date: 19 Jan 2017

Reviewer: Mark Limmer

Reviewer's report:

General Comments

This paper seeks to describe a DST process carried out with participants from the indigenous Maori population in New Zealand. It describes how delivering the process in a culturally appropriate way encouraged participation and engagement with the project.

The focus for this paper is important and it has the potential to contribute usefully to the methodological literature exploring the importance of adapting methodologies to the cultural context within which they are applied.

However, the paper itself needs major revision before it is suitable for publication. Much of the concern lies in the structure and clarity of the paper as highlighted in more detail below - essentially as it stands the paper does not begin by adequately setting out the current evidence base such that the purpose and contribution of the paper can be assessed; the methodology is not adequately described, justified or critiqued; and consequently the results are difficult to assess. The final discussion needs to focus much more explicitly on the contribution that the paper is seeking to make.

Having said that, the project being described is fascinating and there are insights that could usefully be shared more widely

Introduction/literature review

Good case made for the role of qualitative research in investigating localised experiences of end of life.
The claim in the literature review that importing methodologies and approaches suitable for western audiences is problematic when researching indigenous communities needs further justification and explanation. What is it that is potentially problematic? Setting this out a little more clearly would provide a basis on which the reader can assess the likely effectiveness of the adaptations made.

Methodology

"Foregoing the western assumption that only outsiders can be objective, we drew upon their lived experience of Māori culture". Can you make more clear how you see objectivity in your methodology - this sentence implies that 'insiders' in qualitative research can be objective - is that the point you are intending to make?

There is a challenge in describing your methodology for an international audience in the context of your appropriate intention to draw on Māori culture and language - the definition of concepts within the body of the text impedes the flow (this was particularly evident in the early section of the methodology). This section needs more careful crafting and possible the addition of a glossary at some point.

The section on the 'pōwhiri' describes an issue that is clearly important to the study, but there needs to be more clarity about how this is conducted, what actually happens to achieve the qualities you describe?

More information on the recruitment process is required - what mechanisms were used, what selection criteria were used, for example. Also some critical reflection of the impact of these recruitment processes on the study.

Similarly more information about the data collection process is needed - what was covered in the questionnaire and the qualitative discussions. Without knowing what was asked it is not possible to fully make sense of the findings.

Results

The first section of the results (up to the sub-heading 'findings') would sit more appropriately in the methodology section as it is essentially describing data collection and analysis - these sections need to be described more fully and critically with reference to methodological literatures.
P11 line 54 onward - given that the aim is to understand issues relating specifically to the Maori context this section needs a sharper focus on that aspect - what is being described would be a consequence of recruitment difficulties in any setting.

P12 - using the powhiri process evidently had a positive impact on participants experience - unpacking the elements that make up this process is required either here or in the methodology.

Discussion

Much of the material in this section needs to be in the review of the literature at the beginning of the paper - this would have contextualised your study better and made it clearer where you particular contribution lies. Both this section and the literature review need to be revised.

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

No

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.

No

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:

Acceptable
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