Reviewer's report
Title: Self-competence in death work among health and social care workers: A region-wide survey in Hong Kong

Version: 0 Date: 21 Feb 2018

Reviewer: Juerg Streuli

Reviewer's report:
Review Feb 20, 2018

Manuscript Number:
PCAR-D-17-00182

Full Title:
Self-competence in death work among health and social care workers: A region-wide survey in Hong Kong

Article Type:
Research article

General notes and summary
1. This paper represents a major effort to present a baseline level and some correlates of self-competence in handling death in health and social care workers with a validated Self-Competence in Death Work Scale (SC-DWS).

2. The Methodology of the study is based on a cross-sectional survey from a convenience sample of 885 health and social care workers in eight healthcare institutions around Hong Kong between January and October 2016 with subsequent analysis of the SC-DWS and its existential and emotional subscales (including multiple linear regression and content analysis).

3. In the absence of a specific research question the authors see their contribution mainly in providing data from the SC-DWS based on a larger and more diverse sample as a reference
point for future studies. Additionally, sociodemographic variables associated with the self-competence level and personal views towards their self-competence in death work were reported.

Major issues:
4. The SC-DWS has been validated by Chan et al in 2015 based on a smaller but similar convenience sample. The current work is a praiseworthy step to enlarge and ameliorate the original data from the validation sample as a reference point for further studies. However, there is some doubt whether the current study has the strengths, which help to overcome pre-existing limitations from the initial validation process:

4a. A convenience sample with regional participants from workshops is not necessarily representative for the target group, especially this may not be the case for the group in which the authors diagnose the most urgent need of more competence in death work. Maybe the authors discuss this limit and present arguments for having a representative sample.

4b. The current sample and the methodology does not support further validation of the SC-DWS. On the contrary, the results presented here even raise some questions about (external) validity. Although discussed, it is not fully plausible to the reader why nurses have (highly) significant lower scores in SC-DWS, existential and emotional scale on sociodemographic variables. Is the SC-DWS beside measuring self-competence confounded by workload, responsibility, environment etc.? Can the authors say something about reliability and validity from their sample?

4c. The results from the qualitative analysis are interesting but poorly connected to the rest of the paper. What was the research question they would like to answer with their mixed-method approach? There is a big number of missing data (N=145 from N = 885), please discuss. Can the authors say something about the non-respondents?

5. One central hypothesis of the authors is the relationship between staff training/ quality improvement and a higher self-competence score. The authors briefly mentioned workshops,
seminars, talks and academic meetings under the Capacity Building Programme, which participants attended. How detailed is this workshop, what influence could it have on participants scores, compared to non-attendees? Is there information (and maybe correlation) regarding specific training in palliative and bereavement care of participants and subsequent higher scores? This could be another future topic, mentioned in 376.

Minor issues:
6. Consider to limit the use of passive voice.
7. Line 351 "examine whether their experience in death work are consistent with our quantitative findings": is consistent or experiences in plural.
8. Include all abbreviations used under Line 379, such as SE and SD.
9. Consider mentioning that a bigger score reflects higher competence in the abstract.

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.
No

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.
I am able to assess the statistics
Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:
Acceptable

Declaration of competing interests
Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

1. Have you in the past five years received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?
2. Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?
3. Do you hold or are you currently applying for any patents relating to the content of the manuscript?
4. Have you received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organization that holds or has applied for patents relating to the content of the manuscript?
5. Do you have any other financial competing interests?
6. Do you have any non-financial competing interests in relation to this paper?

If you can answer no to all of the above, write 'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.

I declare that I have no competing interests.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal. I understand that my name will be included on my report to the authors and, if the manuscript is accepted for publication, my named report including any attachments I upload will be posted on the website along with the authors' responses. I agree for my report to be made available under an Open Access Creative Commons CC-BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). I understand that any comments which I do not wish to be included in my named report can be included as confidential comments to the editors, which will not be published.
I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal