Reviewer's report

Title: An evaluation of a data linkage training workshop for research ethics committees

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Reviewer: Karolyn White

Reviewer's report:

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
The need for training members of Human Research Ethics Committees (HRECs) to appropriately and confidently review data linkage projects, especially the privacy implications of such research projects, is well articulated.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
The scoping study to establish a need for data linkage training, development of the training program and training pilots and the three phase evaluation of the face to face workshops are appropriate and all phases well described.

3. Are the data sound?
Insofar as I can ascertain the data are sound. Establishing a need for data linkage training, development of the training material, delivery etc are appropriate and consistent with best practice. The survey questions are suitable. I cannot comment on the statistical analysis as this is outside of my area of expertise.

4. Do the figures appear genuine?
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?
In the main the discussion and conclusions are well balanced and supported by the data. I would, however, suggest discretionary revisions to the discussion section. Projects that link data or use linked data are not commonly reviewed by the majority of Australian HRECs. But data linkage projects, as the authors maintain, are 'rapidly' increasing. HREC members who do not have the relevant research expertise may not realise that they are reviewing data linkage projects, or alternatively, miss the ethical significance of such projects. It would be helpful if the discussion included more information and explanation about projects which link data or use linked data - what these look like and what is ethically important about them - so HREC members can identify the research as data linkage projects and identify why they should receive training to review them. It might
also be useful to readers not familiar with data linkage projects if the information/explanation about data linkage projects included examples.

I am convinced by the author’s argument that face to face delivery is apposite for training HREC members and superior to on-line courses. As they assert, this is important in the current educational climate. Training must be effective, improving the skills, competence and confidence of HREC members.

I would like to suggest a discretionary revision to the conclusion. Given that data linkage projects are not usually reviewed by the majority of HRECs, especially those established at Universities, would the authors consider commenting about the need for on-going education?

7. Are the limitations of the work clearly stated?
The limitations are clearly stated. The training increased the confidence of those who attended the workshops. And as the authors point out, more research needs to be done to assess whether such training improves or compliments participants’ skills and competence.

8. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building...?
Yes, the manuscript is appropriately referenced.

9. Do the title and abstract convey what has been found?
Yes the title and abstract are clear and concise and accurate.

10. Is the writing acceptable.
Yes, the writing is clear and discussion cogent.

I would like to thank the editors for allowing me to review this paper. It is of a high academic standard, it is also well written and the views cogent. The paper discusses a worthy issue and will be of interest of those in the research ethics community. I hope this review makes it clear that I believe the paper should be published and hope also that any suggestions I have made are helpful to the authors.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**
I declare that I have no competing interests.