Reviewer's report

Title: Aboriginal health research in the remote Kimberley: An exploration of perceptions, attitudes and concerns of stakeholders

Version: 4 Date: 16 July 2014

Reviewer: Mark Brough

Reviewer's report:

Reviewer Comments
Thanks for the opportunity to review this paper. I found the paper engaging, credible, balanced and significant in its contribution to ideas. The paper takes up a critical issue in Aboriginal health research in terms of the ways in which researchers go about community consultation. Whilst much has been written about the importance of community collaboration in Aboriginal health, this paper is notable in that it is written from a local experience of attempting to manage this process (though see my comments below requesting further detail about this). The paper is constructive in its critical appraisal of Aboriginal health research as played out through the KAHPF Research Subcommittee experience. The methodology is generally sufficiently explained (see suggestion below for clarifications needed) and the findings reported clearly and convincingly. I recommend this paper for publication subject to some important revisions suggested below.

Major Essential Revisions
My suggestions below are more about sharpening the paper and ensuring that it appeals to the wider audience it deserves. I don’t think the changes needed are large in scope but I think they are strategically important in terms of the readership of the journal.

1. The paper sets out the background to the research well, but could be more explicit in terms of its contribution to knowledge. The paper provides an interesting case study regarding the processes/challenges of community consultation in Aboriginal health research, but I would like to hear more from the authors about how they position the paper in terms of significance, and original contribution to knowledge. In the review of the literature concerning Aboriginal health research, it would have been good to identify a clearer gap in knowledge and present the paper as a contribution to that gap in a more explicit fashion.

2. I wondered about the ‘voicing’ of the paper. The paper gives the impression of a ‘local’ perspective, but this is not explicitly stated and indeed the voicing of Aboriginal and or a non-Aboriginal perspective is also not clear. Given the nature of the paper and its concern to create greater local control of Aboriginal health research, I think it would be useful to more clearly position the paper in this regard.

3. I would have liked to have the notion of ‘stakeholders’ more explicitly defined
since this group is so central to the paper. I liked the juxtaposition in the findings between the committee and the researcher’s perspectives (later in the findings) but then wasn’t sure whether researchers were meant to be positioned as stakeholders or not. The title, abstract and introduction seem to suggest that stakeholders includes everyone, but then the section in the findings ‘External researchers’ perspectives suggests something of a dichotomy with ‘stakeholders’. Equally in the findings the various concerns raised by ‘stakeholders’ suggests that the term means members of the committee only. I think this needs sharpening in the paper to remove ambiguity.

4. The ‘lone’ sentence about ethical approval needs elaboration. I was left wondering why the project was given exemption from need for ethical approval rather than approval, particularly as it involved not just an audit of existing documentation but also a survey of researchers. Ie I am not clear on what basis a survey would be given exemption from ethical review?

5. The Methods section could be clearer in terms of creating a ‘match’ with the findings. The findings are predominantly qualitative; hence I wasn’t completely convinced that this was actually a ‘mixed method’ study as indicated in the abstract. Equally whilst the methodology describes the use of a survey with researchers which includes both closed and open questions, the findings from this group seemed to be qualitative only? I enjoyed the findings as they are presented, but having had a certain expectation raised in the methodology of some quantification to come from the survey I felt the paper was setting up un-necessary contradictions for itself in how it framed its methodology versus what data is actually presented. I suggest the methodology section needs to some re-framing, (or else the findings need some expansion to include quantified survey results) to create a clearer match. (I acknowledge there are a few quantifications given regarding the number of applications received by the committee, but for me this seems more like context rather enough to satisfy the claim of a mixed method study.

6. As I note in 1. above, the paper could position itself more strongly as having significance beyond the Kimberley in the background. This is true in the discussion and conclusion too. I think the paper undersells itself in this regard. Whilst, of course, the findings are about research in the Kimberley, and there should be caution in assuming wider applicability, I think there could be a thoughtful tone introduced in the paper, of the Kimberley as a case study of an issue that is of significance across Australia and indeed beyond since the whole issue of community consultation/ participation/ engagement/ control/ capacity is so often discussed in a superficial way with little reference to the on-the-ground experience. This is where the significance of the paper in providing a ‘local’ perspective ‘talking back’ to those who do the consulting is a very significant contribution, but could be more sharply articulated. I think the paper would appeal to a wider readership if it positioned itself more strongly in terms of its thoughts about its wider significance. I like the paper for making a strong concluding stance regarding the need for local control capacity and perhaps this could be more strongly claimed with reference to for example wider discussions about de-colonising research (eg Linda Tuhiwai Smith – Decolonizing
Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples)

Minor essential revisions
The paper is clearly expressed with just a couple of small texts errors I noted. Line 7 p. 6 strengthening; P. 12 line 9 where

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

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