Author's response to reviews

Title: Human rights and mental health in post-apartheid South Africa: lessons from health care professionals working with suicidal inmates in the prison system

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Author’s response to reviews:

Thank you for the opportunity to revise and resubmit this manuscript. We wound the review comments very help and believe that they have helped us to refine and focus the work.

Editor Comments:

We have added the reference number to the methods section.

Brian McKenna (Reviewer 1):

We have significantly expanded the discussion section and made more explicit the focus of the paper on highlighting the gap between legislative/policy frameworks in SA and practices within prisons. We have made it clearer that the unique contribution of this paper is to highlight what our data reveals about the need for ongoing advocacy and transformation in the country.

We have reformatted the findings section and augmented it to draw attention to the participants’ description of how they feel professional and ethical compromised by the way in which they are required to do their work.

Two references have been added to substantiate this claim.

We have added references to previous work with health professionals in prisons.

We have removed this premature reference to the findings.

We have made it explicit that we adopted an exploratory qualitative research methodology and we have offered a rationale for this choice of methods. We have added more detail about the content of the interview schedule. We have also provided more specific information about the
two correctional centres where participants were recruited, so that the context of the research is clear.

We have also augmented the background section to include a richer description of the SA prison system.

More details of the research participants have been provided.

We have provided more clarity about why this paper only reports on the second superordinate theme. We have reported the findings of the first theme in another publication (currently under review with the South African Journal of Psychology) which focuses on the implications for suicide prevention in prisons and clinical practice. We have also clarified the focus of this paper on the human rights implications and a discussion of the second superordinate theme in relation to the need for ongoing advocacy and transformation.

We have reworked the results section to make the presentation of findings more substantial by expanding the narrative about the sub-theme. We have put all quotes into italics so that they are highlighted and we have curtailed the length of quotes were possible.

We have however, retained the stylistic decision to integrate some of the quotes into the narrative of each subtheme as we believe this improves the readability of the paper and helps to retain the voices of the participants. We prefer this method of reporting particularly in a paper which does not aim to give a full overview of all the data but to deal with a specific aspect. We would however be prepared to make further changes if the reviewer requires it.

Thank you for these comments. Our primary focus in this article is not on the detail of clinical practice, but following your recommendations we have made more clear our argument concerning the importance of mental health advocacy in scare-resource environments. We apologise of our rather opaque formulation on p.13 of the original MS as correctly noted by the reviewer, and we have expanded our discussion to make clearer the basis for the claim.

Ritsuko Kakuma (Reviewer 2):

We have significantly expanded the background section and methods section to describe the broader context of the study, the SA prison system, and the specific prisons in which we collected data. We have provided details of the legislative framework within which prisons operate as well as specific details of the size and composition of the prisons where we collected data.

We have added more detail to the methods section, including details about the interview schedule.

We have clarified details of the study setting in the methods section.

We have added the ethics number for the study.
We have provided details of the demographic characteristics of participants as a group. If we provide more details of each individual we will make them identifiable.

We have provided clarity about this in the results section.

We have reformatted the findings section to take account of this.