Reviewer’s report

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

Version: 0 Date: 23 Jul 2017

Reviewer: Brian McKenna

Reviewer’s report:

Thank you for submitting this manuscript for review. The research focuses on the experience of health professionals working with suicidal prisoners. The manuscript is framed as if the health professionals would experience something different in working with this issue in South Africa, post-Apartheid.

Overall I found this to be a well written manuscript, which is easy to read. However, the analysis and discussion are somewhat superficial and the research does not add anything new to our understanding of the experience of health professionals working in correctional contexts. In the abstract it states that "Findings draw attention to the complex ethical and human rights challenges mental health professionals in post-apartheid South Africa face", yet none of this was fleshed out in the interviews undertaken. This is an acceptable conclusion, as long as the findings are discussed in relation to the international understanding. However, this comparison is not evident.

In the background section, p. 3, lines 54-58, the sentence beginning "It has been more..." requires a reference. There are grounds for extending this literature overview to consider the international experience of mental health professionals working with suicidal prisoners in the prison context. On p. 5, lines 110-114, there is reference to the findings of the study. It is important not to reveal findings before the results are outlined.

The methods section requires a mention of what type of qualitative research this actually is and a rationale for the research approach used. More detail is also required on the actual specifics of the semi-structured interview schedule used. An overview of the two prisons the participants were drawn from is also required.

In this section, or the results section, a description of the sample, i.e. the 10 mental health professionals, is needed. In the latter section, two themes are eluded to but the sub-themes of only one are reported on. I am not sure why this is the case and a rationale is required in this regard. This "cutting off" of the data might be one reason why the results at times appear to be somewhat superficial. This is not helped by the way that the findings are reported. On each sub-theme there needs to be a narrative about the sub-theme (which at the moment is brief). Examples of the data to support the sub-theme need to highlighted separately (probably in italics) and not integrated with the narrative. Quotes from the data are also often too long and need to be concise and pithy. Also themes are often discussed in relation to the prison context rather than
care of the suicidal prisoner (the intent of the research). This needs to be rectified. On the basis of the above I recommend a re-write of the results section.

The Discussion/Conclusion also requires a re-write with more attention paid to the implications of the findings of this study for clinical practice in prisons, for the education of health professionals and for future research. In doing so a stronger link to the literature on what is presently understood needs to be substantiated. On p.13, lines 296-298, the following statement is made "Currently, mental health professionals are working within a democratic dispensation, but without the reasonable hope of major positive social change." I see nothing in the findings that presently supports this statement.

**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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