Reviewer's report

Title: Stigma in health facilities: why it matters and how we can change it

Version: 0 Date: 10 Aug 2018

Reviewer: M. Stewart

Reviewer's report:

Your paper addresses an important issue and introduces relevant interventions but I believe it needs major revisions before being considered for publication as a research article. The format of the abstract and of the paper doesn't follow that of the journal in terms of having clearly delineated Background, Methods, Results, and Conclusion sections. The reference to the article as a debate article is confusing for a research article. The focus of the paper is confusing - it seems initially to be framed as a review of the literature on stigma reducing interventions in healthcare system/settings but the content does not follow this framing.

On p. 1 of the paper (numbered from Introduction page): line 36: It is unclear what you mean by "common nature". Do you mean the effects are common? Or that it manifests the same across diverse settings? Or that stigmatized individuals have a common experience independent of the characteristic(s) or condition(s) associated with their being stigmatized? Lines 37-38: There are a number of unstated assumptions embedded within this statement and it needs to be more fully explained, justified, and supported.

p. 2, line 4: Why only 5 years? What is the justification for looking back only 5 years? This is not a new problem. Surely valuable literature exists prior to this cut-off.

p. 2, lines 6-9: Methods are not described. Even if this was not a systematic literature review, the methods for identifying and screening articles for inclusion and exclusion need to be defined. How were articles included in the review analyzed? What approach was used to decide which "specific methods" would be "highlighted"? You reference stigma reduction approaches, methods, and strategies as though they are interchangeable but these have different meanings. It's not clear what exactly you were looking for in your search and how you decided to what to include.

p. 2, line 16: Where are the methods? The headings for a research article are different from what is presented in this paper.

p. 2, lines 29-53: References for these statements are needed.
p. 2, line 60: This concept (generic stigma) needs to be defined.

p. 2, line 55-58: What was the justification for selecting these conditions and not others?

p. 3, line 4: Explain what you mean by measurement: Measurement of stigma or measurement of its consequences?

p. 3, lines 6-9: How is this related to the previous clause about generic stigma measurement?

p. 3, line 9: What are you referring to here where you say "this points to…"? Are you saying that because the consequences of stigma were similar the interventions to reduce stigma will be similar across different types of characteristics or conditions that are associated with stigma? If this is your argument, you need to go further to justify it because there are many instances where this would not be the case. In addition, the influence of variations in the socio-cultural and economic context within which the healthcare system is operating is not discussed though the occurrence of stigma can vary widely by these and other contextual aspects.

p. 3, Table 1: This table is confusing. What is it based on and what does it mean exactly? Are there citations to back up this information?

p. 3, Paragraph starting with line 49: This section presents information on methods used but more detail is needed and the section needs to be organized under a Methods Heading.

p. 4, lines 10-14: Why were so many of the articles excluded? What were your exclusion criteria? What are the references for these specific 42 studies and how do they relate to the interventions described below, for example, refs 52 and 53? Why is this referred to as a debate article when it's submitted as a research type of article?

p. 4, line 16: This section presents Results of your literature review. Not Discussion as the heading suggests above. Methods and Results sections need to delineated. More detail here would be helpful to increase the rigor of the paper. How many interventions were identified? How many of the interventions were used in multiple studies, increasing the evidence base for their effectiveness? What was the rigor/quality of the studies testing these interventions in terms of study design, sample size, etc.?

p. 5, Table 2: Citations indicating which studies used which methods and approaches would strengthen the paper. More information about the studies identified would also be helpful such as
who (what cadre of worker, their status, etc.) implemented the interventions, intervention intensity and duration, sustainability of effect, etc. Your paper gives more information about the gaps than about the actual interventions identified. Is there not more to learn from the interventions that have already been studied?

p. 5, line 47: Only gaps in diseases foci are noted - what about the strength of evidence for interventions identified? What were the strengths and weaknesses of the studies identified?

p. 6, lines 6-11: needs a citation.

p. 6, lines 14-25: It is confusing to identify these as gaps in the literature and then go into a discussion where literature describing implementation of these interventions is described. Why are you not including these later references in your review?

p. 6, line 40: What does HPP stand for? Not previously defined.

p. 7, line 18: The organization of your paper is confusing to me. This seems like results to me but you have it listed under your discussion section. Are these included in the table above? It would be helpful to make this connection more clear.

p. 7, line 21: "Putting the stigmatized": I would use language that implicates society as the stigmatizing force such as "individuals victimized by stigma". These patients are individuals who are being victimized by stigma acted out by others.

p. 7, line 28: "from the lit identified", needs citations.

p. 8, line 4: Further explanation where you reference the use of technology would be helpful - for example, in theory patient portals linked to electronic medical records have the potential to facilitate transgender patients entering their own information to help them avoid stigmatizing experiences such as being able to enter their name and pronouns prior to visiting the clinic to reduce the likelihood of being misgendered when seeking care.

p. 10, 1st bullet in table: This recommendation doesn't follow from the data presented - more information is needed about the strength of the evidence so this recommendation can be supported.
These are potentially good recommendations but not supported by the data presented in your review.

5th bullet: This statement doesn't acknowledge the fact that some conditions are less stigmatized because of the cultural context in which they occur - ie. Re: religious conservatism, etc. you reference "specific health conditions, but it could also be characteristics of the patients themselves such as being in a gender minority - which is in itself stigmatized by society to varying degrees, depending on the context.

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.

Not applicable

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

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