Reviewer’s report

Title: Challenges of foot self-care in older people: a qualitative focus-group study

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Reviewer: Gavin Wylie

Reviewer’s report:

Thanks for the opportunity to review this manuscript. I see that it has already been reviewed, and the authors have diligently responded to the reviewer's suggestions, but unfortunately I cannot recommend publication. This is for a number of reasons. I will make number of specific points, then summarise, and make a suggestion:

1. Undoubtedly, the paper contains data that may have utility in the Finnish context, but I feel it will have limited appeal to the international readership of JFAR. Some of the terminology will be unusual for the international audience of JFAR, and they are not defined - e.g. multi-level professionals? We do not know what licensed practical nurses are.

2. I found a number of the supporting references in the text did not necessarily support the statements being made - for example, on page 17, the statement about the positive effect of health education is only supported by two references from studies conducted on very specific minority populations - furthermore one of these references is 10 years old.

3. The organisation of the manuscript is a little mixed up - the section headed 'Characteristics of the participants' belongs in the results section.

4. Whilst I appreciate the choice of method, I think the authors need to justify why the qualitative descriptive (QD) design approach was taken and provide an overview of QD - not just that focus groups were used as the means of data collection.

5. In particular, page 7 line 7 talks about focus group themes based on previous studies. Initially I thought this meant themes as in qualitative analysis themes. I realised later that this is not what the authors meant, but it is confusing. I think what you mean to say is topic guide. In any case, you need to refer to the studies that informed the topic guide - and not just a qualitative methods textbook.

6. Page 9, line 22 - Isn't washing the feet a normal hygiene task anyway?

7. I appreciate that this may be as a result of translation, but some of the language is a little strange for an academic paper - 'thoughtlessness' and 'laziness'. I see that these words were changed following the suggestion from reviewer 1 - they are not a great improvement, in my view. They are a bit victim-blaming and paternalistic. Multiple
terms are used to refer to the participants - e.g. pensioner. Don't do this. Use older people throughout.

8. I am not clear on the approach to analysis - the authors state that an inductive approach was taken but that the research questions informed the coding (I think that is what is meant anyway - I apologise if I misunderstand - in which case this should be clearer!). If the RQs inform the analysis, then it is not truly inductive. It is probably a bit inductive and a bit deductive.

9. The first paragraph of the results should explicitly state what the themes are. As it is, the reader needs to go and look at the figure. The conceptual model presented is good and useful, however.

10. The suggestions for intervention - e.g. lectures or education sessions - is not novel - I suspect this conclusion could have been drawn without doing the study.

11. The discussion amounts to little more than a list of findings from other studies about interventions for the feet. Reference is made to interventions in the Finnish context - this comes as a bit of a surprise, and perhaps some mention should be made of this in the introduction. It seems this study was done in order to inform an intervention of some sort - this kind of comes out in the discussion, but should also really be mentioned in the introduction.

In summary, I was quite excited when I initially saw the title of this manuscript, but sadly, I was a wee bit underwhelmed - mainly because I was left thinking that an opportunity had been missed for a more sophisticated analysis. In terms of the conclusions, I am not sure that the manuscript offer anything particularly novel - lectures are suggested as a means of imparting foot health information, but is this really the best approach? I can't help but think this work represents a missed opportunity to rethink how self-care in this area can be delivered. I would encourage the authors to go back to the data and maybe have a fundamental rethink about where you could take this work.

Suggestion: A more novel approach might have been to frame the study in terms of behaviour change - and perhaps drawing more from the empirical literature on self-managing long-term conditions. This approach might then take a more systematic approach to informing intervention development, by taking account of the processes behind motivation, intention and action. The authors might look to the Behaviour Change Wheel for a bit more on this. See:

https://implementationscience.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1748-5908-6-42

Rather than end on a complete negative, I would congratulate the authors for conceiving of the study, as well as for the data collection (I know how long this takes) - this is an important topic - it's just that the manuscript falls down on the execution.

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