Reviewer's report

Title: The consultation of rugby players in co-developing a player health study: feasibility and consequences of sports participants as research partners

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Reviewer: Sophie Söderholm Werkö

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Review of "The consultation of rugby players in co-developing a player health study: feasibility and consequences of sports participants as research partners."

The topic of the article is interesting as it seems the authors are arguing the uniqueness of sport players in the role of the person ultimately affected by research on his/her group's own health - making the reader interested in whether or not this is actually unique or could be stated to be very much similar to the role of a patient with a specific disease. This is however never unfortunately discussed, which is a shame as it would be interesting to read what similarities or differences the authors may have found had it been a comparative study. Nevertheless, and perhaps more from a research and research funding perspective, it is an interesting topic especially from a pragmatic perspective, i.e. given the identified benefits and difficulties - is there something we can do about it?

A General comment: Throughout the paper the authors make no difference between public (i.e. citizen) or user (i.e. in this context player, but patients are also mentioned as well as users), anyway those who are directly concerned. There is a lack of a clear distinction between these two different perspectives in this paper and I would strongly suggest this to be added and early on in the manuscript, not as now when it is not until on p.11 it is being discussed and even then without clearly making the distinction between the two perspectives. Instead as a reader I am now under the impression that the authors are talking about the user perspective and not so much the public - i.e. citizen/tax-payer's perspective although this is never clearly stated. This should be covered as soon as the authors write about public involvement, just to make it clear for the reader. Currently it is unclear to the reader throughout the document exactly who is the public when referring to "members of the public", "public involvement", "public accountability". Unclear use of the term, sometimes used in the sense of the users, sometimes in the sense of the citizens.

Other comments: In the conclusion section of the abstract, it is stated that "...but will more importantly improve the experience of players participating in this study", not explaining for the reader in what way or why that is? So the important thing is the experience of the survey, replying to the survey? This seems a bit weird, why should that be important if not to improve
either the response rate or the reliability for example? Surely the most important criteria must have to do with the quality of the research and not the experience of the survey?

In Plain English summary p.3, the authors state that "it has not been implemented equally across all study areas" but they do not explain why that is, any reasons for it or even if that is a problem? In the 2nd paragraph it is stated that "…the questionnaire would collect their experiences and answer questions that players' want answered". First of all this makes it sound as if there are major discrepancies between the questions that players want answered as opposed to those that researchers or funders want answered - which may be correct - if so, it would be interesting if there could be examples provided on this. Secondly, if this is not the case, it sounds as if only those questions that players want answered are relevant/important and should there be questions that researchers or funders are more interested in answering, then those are not as important - which may be correct as well - but again, if so, please provide examples of this or reformulate the sentence. In the last paragraph it is stated that "...a useful activity that will benefit the research…” but nothing is said on how or in what way this should be done.

Under the heading Background p.6, 3rd paragraph has a line which is impossible to understand: "alongside concerns of avoiding conscious or unconscious tokenistic involvement". What does this phrase mean? What does this phrase add? Why is that important to mention? On p.7 it is unclear if the authors are referring to a UK perspective or an international/global perspective when saying that public involvement traditionally has been undertaken more in the areas of mental health, indigenous population health and cancer. Then they go on to say that it may be the chronic nature of these conditions that is the reason for why these areas are more involved in research and healthcare, but if this argument was the case, then shouldn't that apply to other areas of chronic diseases as well, for example diabetes and asthma?

At the end of page 7 (and on several other places as well) it is argued that potentially the recruitment will be increased and/or improved, but it is never explained how this should be done or in what way the recruitment will be increased or improved. Later on p.11 it is stated in bullet point no.3 that recruitment methodology was being consulted upon, but it is not explained how. Finally in the Discussion on p.21 the authors state that interpretations of the responses has influenced methods of recruitment. But how? This is interesting, Please explain/elaborate on this. The authors end the paper with stating that they anticipate that the process will strengthen the recruitment of this study but it is unclear to the reader how or in what way this would be achieved.

On p.8, end of 2nd paragraph, the authors bring up "the low-level of compliance surrounding return-to-play procedures". This is hard to understand. Does it mean not following rules of when to return or what does it mean? I would like an explanation.
The whole first section under the heading Rugby players as experts of their own experience and environment on p. 9 does not belong to this heading, the text is really more of background or introduction and would belong better there.

Nowhere in the manuscript is it described how long the fora lasted - was it 10 minutes, an hour, two hours? Just mentioned as "a relatively short session" in the Discussion on p.21, but what is relatively short? Nor are the readers told how many participants attended the two different foras, only that 11 persons attended altogether. But the context is quite different if 9 people attended the first one and only 2 attended the 2nd one, compared to a more even spread of e.g. 5 at the 1st one and 6 at the 2nd one. I am also wondering about the attendance rate, i.e., how many players were invited to participate to begin with? And why was there only one female - does this reflect the general participation of women in rugby, is the gender participation proportional or is there another explanation?

On p.13 under the heading The fora, the player-lead is described, but at this point it is not explicitly stated that this person also is or was a player him or herself with own experience. This is described at the end of the paper on p.20, but would be good to have here as well as the reader is wondering about that at this point.

The first two sentences under the heading Results on p.14 are not results - they provide information that belong in the previous section.

Final sentence p.14 "...in a cyclical manner" - not sure what that means in this context? Please explain.

In the 2nd section on p.19, the last sentence states "...as enabling members of the public to critique the research cycle more effectively and improve their confidence" - whose confidence and in what? The public's (users'?) confidence in research or what?

On p.23, last sentence before the heading Key reflections on process, it says that players did not formally evaluate the process. OK, so they were not asked to do so, but did they voice it themselves, that they would have wanted to?

Also on p.23, under Key reflections on process, it says that players willingly gave their time - I take it they did so without any pay or benefits given? Would be good to state that here.

I note that under Difficulties on p.24, nothing is listed in the bullet list on gender and what possible implications - if any - this could have when interpreting the results of the study. Nor is
there anything on the participation rate - 11 participants of how many and how did the authors reason about the numbers of participants?

Minor remarks: Only a few (four) abbreviations are used in the article, and most of them are well-known, even for an audience outside the UK as well, such as the "UK" and "NHS". Given that there are so few abbreviations I suggest these to be taken out and the whole words instead to be written out, especially the BME which is confusing for the reader in the current form as it is not explained when first used (on p.7). There is a list of abbreviations, but this is presented at the end of the document which is too late.

Language generally very good, but needs to be checked as on several places what should be fora is now written as for a (two words) etc.

Reference missing to the statement on p.9, first paragraph after "…partly due to their relatively short admissions."

Difficult word for non-native English speakers on p.18 - phraseology - please explain or change this word.

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