Reviewer’s report

Title: EXPLORING EXPERIENCES OF PEOPLE PARTICIPATION ACTIVITIES IN A BRITISH NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE TRUST: A SERVICE USER-LED RESEARCH PROJECT.

Version: 1 Date: 28 Oct 2018

Reviewer: Lisa Brighton

Reviewer's report:

The authors present a user-led qualitative service evaluation which aims to understand peoples' experiences of People Participation schemes, in terms of why they join, how it may influence their recovery, and potential areas for improvement. I congratulate the team on an exciting piece of work and look forward to seeing this paper progress.

I think one of the challenges at the moment is that the paper struggles with trying switching back and forth between the service evaluation and methodological reflections on this being a user-led piece of work. As a result I think it doesn't attend to aspect of rigour for the qualitative work as well as it could. I wonder if it may be helpful to keep the focus and story of the paper on the qualitative service evaluation, but with an important area in the discussion dedicated to the authors methodological reflections. This might help to tidy the main paper but keep the important learning for those interested in user led research.

Please see below for comments relating to specific sections.

Scientific Abstract:

The abstract could be strengthened by a slightly clearer explanation of the people participation schemes (this is done well in the lay summary where examples are given for what the scheme involves).

It may also be important to adapt the language to suit an international audience, so talking about 'British National Health Services' or something rather than NHS Trusts.

I have reservations about stating the specific trust this was evaluated in, in terms of whether this may reduce participants anonymity. It might be worth reflecting on whether referencing the location as London might be enough.

The conclusion needs to relate to the aims of the project and the implication of these for People Participation and similar schemes, rather than reflecting on the methods.
Lay summary:

Again, the conclusion needs to stick to the main aim of the study, and it would be strengthened by being more specific.

Introduction:

As someone who doesn't work in mental health, talking about whether People Participation is good for 'recovery' didn't quite make sense to me at first. It might help to either talk about benefits to health in broader terms, or if these schemes tend to sit within mental health it might be helpful to make this clearer in terms of context.

The authors state there is 'little systematic evaluation' of these schemes - if there is some please refer to this in the introduction.

Some of the language needs balancing - for example the authors talk about exploring potential benefits, but I assume they were also interested in potentially negative outcomes too.

Where the authors start to introduce their user-led approach, it would help to understand why this approach was chosen. Similar to the editor's previous comments I'm less sure about calling the methods novel, but rather 'emerging' or something like that.

The final question of the evaluation talks about suggestions to make it more attractive - but this is a little tricky as this sort of assumes benefit. It might be better to talk about 'suggestions for improvement' to avoid this judgement.

Methods:

Please double check the paper for abbreviations that are not explained (e.g. ELFT).

Please review where very short paragraphs / single sentences may be able to be combined into a paragraph, as this may help the flow for the reader.

In line with focusing on the evaluation, I wonder if the details about recruitment of the service-user researchers could be placed in a box and referred to briefly in the text.

I found the bit about the training materials a little hard to follow - at first I thought they were to train the service-user researchers but then it seems like they helped adapt it. Please can this section be clarified? If again this is part of the induction of the service user researchers, this
could sit with the recruitment details - whereas if this was for the workshops it sounds like they are part of the evaluation methods.

I'm not sure it is helpful to measure the quantitative component - it might be helpful either to state the aim of this other component (to make it clear why it is being completed and written up separately) or not mention at all.

Overall the description of the qualitative methods requires some strengthening, and would benefit by being written in line with the COREQ reporting guidance for qualitative studies. It would be useful to understand whether the work was underpinned by any particular theory or approach, and if this was definitely using content analysis or actually thematic analysis (as the presentation of the results seems like the latter). It is important to know whether the analysis was completed deductively or inductively, whether there was consideration of saturation, divergent cases, reflexivity, etc., and whether there were procures in place to improve rigour (e.g. dual coding). Please also mention the sampling method.

Results:

I wonder if more detail could be given in regard to the participants' ethnicities, as 40% are currently not reported.

Please attached anonymised ID numbers to the quotes, to help the reader see if a mixture of participants are represented.

Although the principles or qualitative research are not focused on numbers, it would be helpful for the narrative to give some indication of how prominent or minor some of the themes were - it seems unlikely that they were all equally as salient.

In presenting the results, be careful not to rely too much on the sub-headings and/or quotes: it is important that the narrative has a good level of detail, including picking up on divergent views.

If possible, I would avoid abbreviating People Participation to PP, just to make it a little easier for the reader.

Discussion:

As mentioned about, this is where it is important to be reflecting primarily on the findings in relation to the aims of the study - rather than focusing too much on the methods. The discussion should summarise the key findings, then relate these to existing literature. It might then help to have a section on methodological reflections which covers the strengths and weaknesses of the evaluation methods, but also has a paragraph on the use of service user researchers and any key
benefits / learning from this. This would include being explicit about why taking a user-led approach was a strength (I agree that it likely is, but we need to understand what difference this seemed to make to the study).

I think that the lack of formal evaluation of the service-user led approach is not a weakness of the study (as it was not what you aimed to do), but is an important area for future research.

Within the implications, be careful not to overstate the potential benefits of People Participation, especially if the current study is the only evidence. It might be worth tempering the language (e.g. our results suggest people participation can reduce social isolation).

Please add further reflections on this project in relation to existing work, including potential international relevance (baring in mind not to take this too far, as this was a service evaluation rather than research).

Please change the conclusions to primarily reflect the study findings in relation to your aims, rather than the service-user led approach.

**Level of interest**

Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

- An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English**

Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

- Acceptable

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