Author’s response to reviews

Title: Registration of randomized controlled trials in nursing journals

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Author’s response to reviews:

Thank you for your feedback. We have made the following amendments to the manuscript.

In addition to the reviewers’ comments, I still have concerns regarding the classification of studies as retrospectively registered before/after submission to the journal in which they were published when date of submission is not available for all studies. As these data are not available, I think it is misleading to separate out retrospectively registered studies by whether the registration date is before or after submission to the journal. I would instead combine the two retrospectively registered categories.

RESPONSE: We have combined these into one group.

Regarding point #2 in reviewer 2’s report (extracting study start dates from the trial registry entry only rather than the published article), I would be happy with this being addressed as a limitation in the discussion section.
Reviewer #1: I am happy with the revised version. I would take out the sentence on page 10 "we acknowledge however this is likely to be an underestimate". This doesn't belong here, it belongs in the discussion but the issue is adequately discussed in the discussion.

RESPONSE: We have removed this sentence.

Typo p13. first line: add "be": ie "...editors need to be..."

RESPONSE: We have amended the text

p15 it is retrospective not retrospectively. 7 lines down.

Reviewer #2: The authors have addressed some of the previous comments. There remain significant concerns with the methods and discussion sections of this manuscript.

Major comments:

1. The authors have included additional information regarding journal selection, including numerous metrics from the Journal Citation Report, in their methods. However, the rationale for journal selection is outlined in the discussion. The authors should describe their rationale in the methods section where this information is most relevant.

Response: We have moved this section of the manuscript and edited the text accordingly

2. The authors state that they extracted study start dates from the trial registry entry, and that they did not check whether these dates agreed with those published in the article. They also recommend that similar studies in the future check for inconsistencies. However, checking for inconsistencies in dates between the published article and the registry entry is already common practice for studies of this type. Furthermore, the dates provided in the published article constitute the most up-to-date information regarding the trial, and as such, most existing studies use these dates instead of those in the registry entry (see Azar et al., PloS One, 2015; Riehm et al., J Psychosom Res, 2015; Byrne et al., Obesity, 2017). The authors should extract study start dates from the published articles, prioritize these dates over the dates in the trial registry entries, and reanalyze their data to reflect these dates.

Response: We have acknowledge this as a limitation in our study.
3. In response to concerns regarding the transparency of the included articles and coding decisions, the authors generated a reference list of the included studies. However, this list does not include any coding decisions. In line with existing studies (see Azar et al., PloS One, 2015; Riehm et al., J Psychosom Res, 2015; Byrne et al., Obesity, 2017), the authors should provide a detailed appendix with coding decisions for each study.

Response: We have added a rationale as to why we have not included coding decisions.

4. In their discussion, the authors recommend that nursing researchers develop a greater awareness of the necessity of trial registration, that journals adopt a policy for trial registration, and that journals publicly report the proportion of published trials that were prospectively registered. These recommendations do not build meaningfully on those provided in the initial manuscript. Two of the three journals examined in this study have some form of trial registration policy, and the results plainly show that these policies are not being adhered to. Moreover, the authors are essentially recommending that journals publicly publish rates of nonadherence to their own policy. There would simply be no motivation for journals to do this. On the other hand, there is ample literature discussing the complicated politics surrounding trial registration, and it would be apt for the authors to frame their discussion in light of these factors. The authors should discuss the limited enforceability of trial registration policies, acknowledge the publishing climate that discourages researchers from registering trials, and provide more reasonable suggestions for the field of nursing research to increase rates of trial registration.

Response: We have amended the discussion to reflect these concerns.

5. There are still some grammatical errors in the manuscript. For example, on page 9, "As 5 but the papers abstract..." and on page 15, "... and any inconsistencies resolved with the trial corresponding author." The authors must carefully review and edit the manuscript to correct grammatical errors, and ensure that any further revisions do not introduce additional errors.

Response: We have carefully checked the paper for grammatical errors.

6. In Table 1, some cells have a simple line through them, whereas others contain "0 (0%)". Both appear to indicate that there were no studies that filled the criteria for these cells. The authors should select either one or the other to facilitate understanding of the results.

Response: We have amended the text accordingly.