Reviewer’s report

Title: Living life precariously with rheumatoid arthritis - A mega-ethnography of nine qualitative evidence syntheses

Version: 0 Date: 19 Aug 2018

Reviewer: Romualdo Ramos

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this very interesting manuscript on "Living life precariously with RA". The authors applied state-of-the-art methodology in qualitative research by pooling the evidence from 9 qualitative evidence syntheses (QES) in a mega-ethnography study. This approach broadens the scope of knowledge by performing "a review of reviews" with studies with different analytic methods.

I hereby list a few suggestions that would improve the overall quality of the manuscript and one major concern which, in my view, would need to be addressed prior to acceptance.

1) My major concern revolves around the soundness of the conceptual model. While the division between the current situation (living precariously) and the coping strategy (reframing the situation) makes sense, the model in and by itself seems somewhat arbitrary. It is hard to visualize (causal) relationships in the model. Highlighting the 10 elements that make up the discussed categories would also help the visualization. In addition, the authors decided to leave patients' experience with DMARDS outside of the conceptual model, yet without any substantial rationale to justify this decision. In my view, these experiences are crucial to the overall QoL of RA patients, and I can hardly think of a compelling argument against its inclusion. Please review and elaborate your conceptual model in a way that makes sense and that is inferable from your results, and justify your approach. Previous theoretical frameworks might help in this endeavor.

2) I am missing a flow-diagram showing how you ended up with the 9 studies. Toye, Seers and Barker (2017) present such a diagram in their mega-ethnography.

3) Table 1: Under "analytic output" I would actually write down the themes and not simple mention the amount. This will lead to a larger, but also more informative Table 1 (allowing comparison).
4) The reference list has 199 entries. I spotted entry nr. 71 as the very last one in the text. Is it possible that the authors included articles in the references that did not meet the inclusion criteria? In any case, please revise accordingly.

5) All in all, the text is well-written and succinct. However, I could still need some proofreading. Here a few things:

- "we used the following search terms" twice under methods

- Avoid tautologies like "category RA is in control of my body describes a feeling that RA was in control of the body" or "this theme describes the need for a positive experience of healthcare" (see title).

- "when others don't appreciate your suffering" probably more like "when others don't take your suffering seriously" ???

- "Reframing the situation" rather than "Reframing the situation is precarious"

- Table 2 is not correctly enumerated.

6) Make sure that the writing style in the Discussion and Conclusion remain objective and with solid arguments.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

No

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Not relevant to this manuscript
Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
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