

Peer Review Report

Review Report on Challenges and solutions in recruiting older vulnerable adults in research

Hints and Kinks, Int J Public Health

Reviewer: Victoria Shepherd

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EVALUATION

Q 1 Please describe the new method reported in this manuscript, and its purpose.

Thank you for the invitation to review this interesting manuscript on a topic that is important and timely given the global ageing population and the current exclusion of groups who are considered 'vulnerable' in research. This commentary reports the methodological challenges in recruiting older vulnerable adults identified through consultation with an international collaboration of experts in ageing.

Q 2 Please highlight the limitations and advantages.

However, there are a few areas of the manuscript that would benefit from further expansion to strengthen the manuscript, primarily around the approach used to identify these challenges. See detailed comments below.

Q 3 Are there objective errors or fundamental flaws? If yes, please detail your concerns.

As a commentary article, it makes a supporting but limited contribution to this area rather than presenting a new perspective or a novel method/contribution.

Q 4 Check List

Is the English language of sufficient quality?

Yes.

Is the quality of the figures and tables satisfactory?

Not Applicable.

Does the reference list cover the relevant literature adequately and in an unbiased manner, including the primary manuscript(s) that describe the methodology?

Yes.

Are the quantitative or qualitative methods sufficiently explained and documented?

No.

Are the quantitative methods valid and correctly applied? (e.g. sample size, choice of test)

Not Applicable.

Are the qualitative methods valid and correctly applied? (e.g. sample selection, method of data collection)

Not Applicable.

Are the data underlying the study available in either the article, supplement, or deposited in a repository?

Not Applicable.

Does the study adhere to ethical standards including ethics committee approval and consent procedure?

Not Applicable.

Q 5 Please provide your detailed review report to the editor and authors (including any comments on the Q4 Check List):

Thank you for the invitation to review interesting manuscript on a topic that is important and timely given the global ageing population and the current exclusion of groups who are considered 'vulnerable' in research. This commentary reports the methodological challenges in recruiting older vulnerable adults identified through consultation with an international collaboration of experts in ageing. There are a few areas of the manuscript that would benefit from further expansion to strengthen the manuscript, primarily around the approach used to identify these challenges.

Introduction

Further details would be helpful on how these challenges were identified by the group – for example at a workshop or other form of discussion? Were they based on experience in conducting research in the five countries, and if so what types of research (clinical trials or other interventional studies, cohort studies etc)?

How was the evidence-base for these challenges established (e.g by searching the literature for evidence to support this or were the papers identified by the consortium members using their prior knowledge)?

Main text

The challenges are implied as being universal. It would be helpful if the authors could reflect on whether there are contextual differences between countries (given the different legal frameworks, healthcare systems, and research infrastructure) and settings (for example, care home/long term care studies are mentioned specifically but the solutions might not be so applicable).

The section on facilitating informed consent moves straight from supporting older people to understand the study information being provided, to recommending that legal representative should be involved for people with cognitive disorders (lines 75–76). It is the margins around determining decisional capacity and informed consent that is often the most challenging for researchers and so it is surprising that the international experts didn't include this complex area. It is also important to note that capacity is decision-specific and that there should not be an assumption that a person with a cognitive disorder requires a legal representative. It would be helpful if issues around capacity could be addressed, and caveats added that people with cognitive disorders do not necessarily lack decisional capacity and that legal representatives should be involved only where it has been established that they do.

The role of involving legal representatives is not to 'maximise recruitment' but to ensure that the decision about participation is based on the wishes and preferences of the person, which might be that they would not want to participate. This statement should be amended (line 76).

Conclusion

The conclusions and recommendations are very broad. It would be helpful if the authors could point to more specific recommendations for future research and for practice.

General comments

There are also a few grammatical and typographical issues throughout which should be addressed during the editorial process, for example lines 30–32 in the first paragraph.

QUALITY ASSESSMENT

Q 6 Rigor



Q 7 Method validated by effective results

Q 8 Applicability

Q 9 Significance to the field

Q 10 Interest to a general audience

Q 11 Quality of the writing

REVISION LEVEL

Q 12 What is the level of revision required based on your comments:

Moderate revisions.