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OPEN PEER REVIEW

Practical Guide for Social Workers in Working with Cancer Patients: A Mixed Study

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1 Original submission

1 comment · 26 Sep 2024

Associate Editor

MAJOR REVISION 26 Sep 2024

Dear Authors,
Thank you for submitting your manuscript to this journal. The topic, focusing on the psychosocial aspects of cancer care, is important and often overlooked. However, there are several concerns that should be addressed in the revised manuscript.
I invite you to revise the manuscript according to the comments provided. Please address each comment in the "reply to editor" file individually. Additionally, highlight the corrected points in red font in the revised manuscript.
I would appreciate it if you could provide the names and email addresses of two reviewers for your manuscript.

Editors' Comments:

The manuscript should be revised by a native editor, as language editing is necessary.
While the authors stated that the study will use mixed methods, it is recommended that this be mentioned in the title. Additionally, the type of mixed methods design should be specified in the abstract, and the different phases should be explained accordingly.
In the first paragraph of the introduction, please use “psychological health” instead of “mental health.”
Instead of listing different issues such as weight gain, pain, etc., please summarize them under the term “self-concept alterations” and provide appropriate citations.
The problem has not been clearly stated. While the psychosocial consequences of cancer are mentioned, it is recommended that the consequences of not addressing these issues be explained in terms of the patients' and families' situations, health system costs, etc. Additionally, since the protocol has been developed in Iran, it is crucial to explain the context in terms of social workers’ roles and responsibilities.
Please explain why having a protocol for cancer patient management for social workers is necessary. What are the existing gaps in the provision of such services that can be improved by having such a protocol?
I believe social workers’ burnout doesn’t relate to the necessity of developing this protocol unless you explain the relationship. Therefore, this section should be removed.
Methods
Please mention what type of mixed methods design has been applied in this study. In which period (month/year) were the data gathered? Moreover, please describe all phases you conducted in a figure to provide an overview of the research method.
It is recommended that the first phase be renamed “Literature Review”.
It would be great if you could summarize the steps of phase 1 in a PRISMA-like flowchart for better clarification.
Please ensure that the methods section is separated from the results. Provide the methods of conducting each of the four phases under the “Methods” section, and then in the “Results” section, provide the results of each phase.
Please rename the second phase “Qualitative Content Analysis Research”.
It is recommended that you clearly explain the aim of your qualitative research. Additionally, please note that the Strauss and Corbin approach is used for conducting grounded theory, which does not align with the aim and other characteristics of your research. Therefore, please use an appropriate method for data analysis, such as “conventional content analysis using the Graneheim and Lundman approach”.
Please remove the limitations section and transfer Table 2 to the appropriate place in the document.

Upon review of the main codes and subcategories, it appears that the extracted codes and categories need revision. While the codes are not similar to those usually extracted, it is unclear why some of them did not lead to a category. Please note that several codes can lead to a subcategory, and subcategories can lead to categories. Therefore, the table should be completely revised.
Please provide more details about Phase 3. Who were the experts, and how were they selected? How many focus groups were formed, and what questions did the researchers ask the participants?
Additionally, Table 3 should be moved to the Results section.
Phase 4 is unclear. For instance, why was the AGREE instrument used? There is no specific clinical guideline introduced in this manuscript that requires validation using AGREE. This section needs further clarification.
Furthermore, the purpose of Table 4 is not clear, and it is not evident which items of the clinical guideline were evaluated.

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Revision 1

AUTHORS' RESPONSE TO REVIEWERS

Authors' reply to reviewers

The next pages contain the authors' point-by-point reply to the comments of this revision round, as submitted with the revised manuscript. It is published as the authors wrote it.

Reply

Associate Editor 1:	*Reply*
The manuscript should be revised by a native editor, as language editing is necessary.	*All the text was edited for language and grammar*
While the authors stated that the study will be a mixed methods one, it is recommended to mention this in the title.	*Practical guide for social workers in working with cancer patients: A mixed study*
Additionally, the type of mixed method should be specified in the abstract, and the different phases should be explained accordingly.	*The desired change was made:* *The present study performed by using a mixed-method approach to developing a protocol for oncology social workers practice in Iran across four phases: conducting a literature review, content analysis, focused group discussions, and evaluating the draft protocol by using the AGREE method. The structure of this guide consists of five main sections: social work approach for specialized interventions, service providing challenges, principles of supportive and palliative care, standards of practice, and professional self-care.*
In the first paragraph of the introduction, please use "psychological health" instead of "mental health."	*The desired change was made*
Instead of listing different issues such as weight gain, pain, etc., please summarize them under the term "self-concept alterations" and provide appropriate citations.	*The desired change was made:* *finally the stress caused by self- concept alterations(10) are some of the consequences of this disease.*
The problem has not been clearly stated. While the psycho-social consequences of cancer are mentioned, it is recommended to explain the consequences of not addressing these issues in terms of the patients' and families' situations, health system costs, etc. Additionally, since the protocol has been developed in Iran, it is crucial to explain the context in terms of social workers' roles and responsibilities.	*The desired change was made:* *Evidence shows that psychosocial support along with medical care improves patients' psychological adjustment and social functioning, reducing suffering caused by the cancer and treatment. A meta-analysis of 45 clinical trial studies emphasizes the importance of psychosocial interventions in promoting emotional adjustment, enhancing resilience, and improving the patient's quality of life*
Please explain why having a protocol for cancer patient management for social workers is necessary. What are the existing gaps in the provision of such services that	*The desired change was made:* *Social workers also, play a vital role for providing cancer care in Iran. They provide services in hospitals and cancer centers, but*

can be improved by having such a protocol? I believe social workers' burnout doesn't relate to the necessity of developing this protocol unless you explain the relationship. Therefore, this section should be removed.	*their role and practices are not clearly defined and a specialized protocol for their services has not been developed. Additionally, most social workers do not receive specialized training in this field during their studies or employment.(15) While to effectively care for their patients, social workers should be qualified in this field; they should know about the growing needs of patients and families, responding to cancer patients based on age and sex, and addressing the developmental needs of children. These professionals should be able to assess patients261 psychosocial needs and provide comprehensive support for patients and families(16).* *Currently, social workers do not have a unified and integrated approach to screen, evaluate, and provide services to cancer patients. Many of these patients do not receive the appropriate psychosocial care of the health system; the burden of care and treatment of these patients is high, and they are frequently admitted to hospitals; caring for family caregivers is neglected; and social workers are exposed to job burnout due to role ambiguity. While the existence of an integrated protocol of social work interventions in the field of cancer can play an important role in the screening and proper care of patients who need to receive psychosocial support and reduce the burden of caring for their family. (17); therefore, this study was conducted with the aim of developing a protocol for oncology social work interventions in hospital and medical centers in Iran.*
Please mention what type of mixed method has been applied in this study. In which period (month/year) was the data gathered? Moreover, please describe all phases you conducted as a figure to demonstrate a general view of the research method.	*The desired change was made:* The present study is performed using a mixed and sequential method; the first phase is conducted by the review method, the second and third phases by the qualitative method, and finally, the evaluation is done using the AGREE model.
It is recommended to revise the first phase	*The desired change was made*

as: "Literature Review".	
It would be great if you could summarize the steps of phase 1 in a PRISMA-like flowchart for better clarification.	*The desired change was made* *Figure 1*
Please ensure that the methods section is separated from the results. Provide the methods of conducting each of the four phases under the "Methods" section, and then in the "Results" section, provide the results of each phase.	*The desired change was made*
Please correct the second phase as: "Qualitative Content Analysis Research".	*The desired change was made*
It is recommended to clearly explain the aim of your qualitative research. Additionally, please note that the Strauss and Corbin approach is used for conducting grounded theory, which does not align with the aim and other characteristics of your research. Therefore, please use an appropriate method for data analysis, such as "conventional content analysis using the Graneheim and Lundman approach".	*The desired change was made*
Please remove the limitations section and transfer Table 2 to the appropriate place in the document.	*The desired change was made*
Upon reviewing the main codes and subcategories, it appears that the extracted codes and categories need revision. While the codes are not similar to usual extracted codes, it is unclear why some of them did not lead to a category. Please note that several codes can lead to a subcategory, and subcategories can lead to categories. Therefore, the table should be completely revised.	*The desired change was made*
Please provide more details about Phase 3. Who were the experts, and how were they selected? How many focus groups were formed, and what questions did the researchers ask the participants? Additionally, Table 3 should be moved to the Results section.	*The desired change was made* In the third phase, the result of the review study and qualitative phase was discussed using focused group discussions. Participants described their specialized interventions and work processes, providing practical examples. Experts proposed solutions to improve service providing. In the final meeting, the proposed process and draft protocol were prepared.
Phase 4 is unclear. For instance, why was the AGREE instrument used? There is no	*The desired change was made* The protocol was presented by eight experts

specific clinical guideline introduced in this manuscript that requires validation using AGREE. This section needs further clarification. Furthermore, the purpose of Table 4 is not clear, and it is not evident which items of the clinical guideline were evaluated	who evaluated it in writing based on six criteria of goal and scope of interventions, stakeholders, development process, clarity of presentation, accessibility and independence. The instrument used in this evaluation was AGREE, which evaluates the health promotion protocol, diagnostic guidelines, treatment and intervention.
Reviewer Assistant	
The study employs a mixed-method approach, which is appropriate for exploring complex interventions like those of social workers in cancer care. However, the specific design (e.g., cohort, case-control, etc.) should be clearly stated.	*The desired change was made*
The background adequately emphasizes the importance of psychosocial support in cancer care, aligning with current health policies. It would benefit from a more detailed explanation of existing gaps in literature or practice that the study aims to address.	*The desired change was made*
The four phases (reviewing sources, content analysis, focused group discussions, and evaluation using the AGREE method) are well-defined. However, more detail on the selection criteria for sources and participants in the focus groups would enhance clarity. *Mentioning the AGREE method for evaluating the protocol is a strong point, as it indicates a structured approach to assessing the quality of guidelines.*	*The desired change was made*
The identification of five main categories for social worker interventions is a significant finding. However, the results section would benefit from quantitative data or qualitative insights that illustrate the impact of these interventions.	*The desired change was made*
The conclusion suggests mobilizing resources for patients, which is practical. However, it could be strengthened by discussing potential implications for policy or practice based on the findings.	*The desired change was made*

Since the study involves observational elements (e.g., focus groups), adherence to STROBE guidelines is essential. Key items to address include: *- Clear definition of outcomes and exposures.* *- Description of the setting and participant selection.* *- Statistical methods used for data analysis.*	*The desired change was made*
Ensure that the evaluation of the protocol is detailed, including how the AGREE criteria were applied and the results of this evaluation.	*The desired change was made*

2 Revision 1

2 comments · 27 Nov 2024 – 27 Nov 2024

Hadis Ashrafizadeh Reviewer

MAJOR REVISION 27 Nov 2024

Hello Dear Researcher,
I am very happy that I have been given the opportunity to review this study. This mixed-methods study was conducted with the aim of providing a practical guide for social workers working with cancer patients.
After reviewing the comments of the previous two reviewers and the corrections made by the researchers, I still have some questions, and I think that more explanations need to be provided in some cases.
Please follow the suggestions below.
1- The abstract should follow the journal's structure and be presented in a structured manner.
2- Keywords should be based on MESH.
3- In the introduction, explain why you are using a mixed-methods approach for this research.
4- I still do not understand the connection involving social workers' burnout. Explain this.
5- The first two lines of the introduction, which are about the relationship with the workers, should be moved to follow the discussion of cancer. Use deductive reasoning (whole to part) to write the introduction. (Cancer, psychological consequences, the role of caregivers, burnout, etc.)
6- What type of sequential mixed-methods research is your research method? Descriptive? Exploratory?
7- State whether your content analysis is conventional or direct.
8- Provide an example of how to code the data in a table.
9- State the Lundman and Graneheim analysis steps in detail.
10- State Dahlgren's validity criteria in your study.
11- State how to combine the results of the first phase (review) and the second phase (qualitative).
12- State the method of selecting samples and the sampling method in the qualitative phase and focus group.
13- State the code of ethics.
14- State the results by phase. (Results of the first phase, second phase, third phase, etc.)
15- Subcategories should be identified with numbers or stars.
16- It would be better if the challenges were not only barriers and if facilitators were separated from them, because facilitators are not challenges.
17- Burnout was not mentioned in the results. If it is not necessary, remove it from the study altogether.
18- Mention the results of the AGREE section in the Results section.
19- It is not clear how the AGREE standards were derived.
20- In the Discussion section, mention the most important results of this study and discuss the results in separate paragraphs.
21- The beginning of the discussion up to reference 24 mostly refers to the need for a protocol for social workers, which should be moved to the introduction and has no place in the discussion.
22- In the Discussion section, you have mentioned the following sentence: "This study identified five main categories for social worker interventions: interventions and approaches in social work practice, service delivery challenges, principles of palliative care, standards of practice, occupational and professional self-care." That is, you are supposed to explain the qualitative results. If your study consists of three phases, you need to discuss the final results after combining the different phases.
23- The discussion needs serious revision.
24- Mention suggestions for clinical application of the results.
25- Add the word reference at the beginning of the references.
26- Identify limitations by mentioning the word limitation.

Best Regards,

Associate Editor

MAJOR REVISION 27 Nov 2024

Dear Authors,
Thanks for submitting the revised version of your manuscript taking the reviewers' comments into account. However, I recently received more comments from another reviewer, and I invite you to revise the manuscript accordingly.
best regards,
Maryam Rassouli

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Revision 2

AUTHORS' RESPONSE TO REVIEWERS

Authors' reply to reviewers

The next pages contain the authors' point-by-point reply to the comments of this revision round, as submitted with the revised manuscript. It is published as the authors wrote it.

Reply

Associate Editor 1:	*Reply*
1- Please, the abstract should be based on the structure of the journal and presented in a structured manner.	*The abstract was structured. (line 5- 17)*
2- Key words should be based on MESH.	*Keywords have been revised. (line 16-17)*
3- In the introduction, explain why you are using a mixed method for this research?	*Line 62-64/ 66-67*
4- I have not yet understood the connection between social workers' burnout. Explain this.	*Job burnout eliminated* *Line 55-56*
5- The first two lines of the introduction, which are about the relationship with the workers, should be moved to after cancer. Use deductive reasoning (whole to part) to write the introduction. (Cancer, psychological consequences, the role of caregivers, burnout, etc.)	*Relocation and modifications were made. (line 45-50)*
6- What type of sequential mixed research is your research method? Descriptive? Exploratory?	*Line 66*
7- State whether your content analysis is conventional or direct?	*Line 97-101*
8- State an example of how to code the data in a table.	*Line 118-122/ table 2 line 165*
9- State the Lundman and Graneheim analysis steps in detail.	*Line 118-122*
10- State Dahlgren's validity criteria in your study.	*Line 123- 126*
11- State how to combine the results of the first phase (review) and the second phase (qualitative).	*Line 129-132*
12- State the method of selecting samples and the sampling method in the qualitative phase and focus group.	*Lines 101-141- 146*
13- State the code of ethics.	*Line 152-155*
14- State the results by phase. (Results of the first phase, second phase, third phase, etc.)	*Lines 156-177*
15- Subcategories should be identified with numbers or stars.	*Subgroups are marked with stars.* *table 3- line 167-168*
16- It would be better if the challenges were not only barriers and facilitators were separated from them because they are not challenges.	*The desired change was made.* *Table 2* *Line 162*
17- Burnout was not mentioned in the results. If it is not necessary, remove it from the study altogether.	*Job burnout eliminated*
18- Mention the results of the AGREE section in the Results section.	*Line 170-176*

19- It is not clear how the AGREE standards were derived.	*Line 146- 150*
20- In the Discussion section, mention the most important results of this study and discuss the results in separate paragraphs.	*The desired change was made.* *Lines 179-201*
21- The beginning of the discussion up to reference 24 mostly refers to the need for a protocol for social workers, which should be moved to the introduction and has no place in the discussion.	*This section is essential for discussing the first stage.*
22- In the Discussion section, you have mentioned the following sentence (This study identified five main categories for social worker interventions: interventions and approaches in social work practice, service delivery challenges, principles of palliative care, standards of practice, occupational and professional self-care.) That is, you are supposed to explain the qualitative results. If your study consists of three phases and you need to discuss the final results after combining the different phases.	*Lines 225-236*
23- The discussion needs serious revision.	*Lines 184-191* *225-236*
24- Mention suggestions for clinical application of the results.	*Lines 236-237*
25- Add the word reference at the beginning of the references.	*lines 189/191/ 194/195/196/208/209/215/220/223/*
26- Identify limitations by mentioning the word limitation.	*Lines 234-238*

3 Revision 2

1 comment · 13 Feb 2025

Associate Editor

ACCEPT 13 Feb 2025

Dear Authors,
We are delighted to inform you that your manuscript has been accepted for publication in our journal. Please be informed that your manuscript will undergo final formatting and editing in preparation for publication. You will receive proofs for your review and approval in due course.
Congratulations on your accomplishment, and thank you for choosing our journal to disseminate your important work.
Best regards,
Prof. Maryam Rassouli,
Associate Editor