Author's response to reviews

Title: The Well-Being of Community-Dwelling Near-Centenarians and Centenarians in Hong Kong - A Qualitative Study

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Version: 3
Date: 23 April 2014

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Response to the Review Team’s Comments

We thank the Editor, Profs. Chou and Nair for their invaluable comments. These suggestions and comments have guided us in revising the manuscript, which we believe is now significantly improved from the first submission. In this document, we discuss how we have revised the manuscript based on the comments. The lines concerned are also highlighted in yellow on the manuscript.

Comments from Reviewer 1

This paper examines the characteristics of near-centenarians and centenarians in Hong Kong and have found four distinctive positive features. It would be helpful if the authors could propose how these positive characteristics of centenarians could be resilient factors for older adults who may face challenges from all aspects of their lives.

Response: Thank you pointing this important missing point out. We added “It seems that these factors have given a sense of “living life to the fullest with the right people” which has prepared them to be resilient even when challenged in all aspects of life.” in the 1st paragraph of the Discussion section. We also highlighted how supportive social networks enhance psychological adjustments in the 2nd paragraph, and discussed the salutary role of positive life attitudes and work life at the late age in the 3rd and 4th paragraph of the Discussion section respectively.

Comments from Reviewer 2

When assessing the work, please consider the following points:
1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
   • Very interesting and timely study.
   • It seems, authors did not systematically indicate why they have chosen to look into the variables they selected.
   • Why socio-cultural influences?
   • Why psychological well-being?
   • It seems as though the first paragraph of the Methods section is better suited for the background section as it more clearly establishes a purpose.

Response: Thank you for raising this. We revised the Introduction extensively to systematically indicate this qualitative study was an extension of our quantitative study which aimed at studying factors for “living long” and the major aim of this study to look at “living well” in a much thorough perspective.
Indicated in the 2nd and 3rd paragraph of the Introduction, we looked at psychosocial factors, which represents “living well” in response to a current lack of investigation in these aspects. Also, we emphasized that psychosocial mechanisms are vital for elderly to maintain their quality of life despite the inevitable increase in physical constraints. (see below)

“Most studies have focused on discussing the biological aspects and family history, with less than one-third of them, however, having examined psychosocial aspects of living long [10].

Several studies have underscored the importance of psychosocial mechanisms for understanding how very long-lived adults maintain their quality of life despite increasing constraints [14,15].”

Also, the Method section was also revised based on the reviewer’s comments.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
   • Qualitative methods were adequately described and well-suited to the age of the population and the questions in which the authors were interested in answering.
   **Response:** Thank you. No revision is made.

3. Are the data sound?
   • The data seemed to reflect only the positive. The possibility that the participants did not want to discuss their concerns to the researchers.
   **Response:** Thank you. We added this point in the limitation as the follows:

   *Besides, the collected information seems to skew greatly to the positive side which was not unusual in the centenarian research as some of them were not inclined to talk about the unhappy parts of their life histories [39]. It was noteworthy that our participants did not share much negative information with us during the interviews. This was probably because, first, we specifically told them that we aimed to know how they lived so long and well; second, the participants were reluctant to discuss their concerns with the research team. This is culturally understandable, in that Chinese elders might be relatively conservative and therefore reluctant to discuss openly their weaknesses and worries in front of others out of concern for their own reputation. Chinese culture emphasizes harmony and face-saving (or mianzi) [38,42]. Mianzi is defined as ‘a social reputation that is highly valued by Chinese’ [42], therefore Chinese may be less likely to disclose their feelings and emotions to others. Previous studies differentiated Chinese communication from North American’s by five communication characteristics which may help explain this limitation: (a) han xu or implicit, (b) ting hua (listening-centeredness), (c) ke qi or politeness, (d) zi ji ren (insider-oriented) and (e) mianzi or face-directed [43,44]. During the interviews, implicit might play so as to limit responses to an emotionally controllable level. Listening-centeredness and Polite might encourage the elderly to answer more positively to entertain the interviewers. Insider-oriented may help explain why they refrain from full and free expression, because the interviewers might not be treated as an “Insider”. Third, in order to protect face, they might hesitate to share life events that might diminish their reputation with the interviewers.*
4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
   • Yes.
   **Response:** Thank you. No revision is made.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
   • The authors dedicated, roughly, the same amount of commentary on each of their findings within the Discussion and Conclusions section.
   **Response:** Thank you. No revision is made.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
   The authors acknowledged that they had a small sample size and stressed the difficulties of recruiting extremely healthy near-and-centenarians. But no other limitations were addressed. If they were stated, this was not obvious.
   **Response:** Thank you. We added one more limitation as pointed out in point 3.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
   • In both the Background and Methods sections of the paper the authors mention previous studies that have researched similar questions. They also spoke extensively about their previous quantitative research upon which this study derived.
   **Response:** Thank you. No revision is made.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
   • Yes, both the abstract and title were directly and accurately related to the content and findings of the paper.
   **Response:** Thank you. No revision is made.

9. Is the writing acceptable?
   • Overall the writing quality is very good but there are simple mistakes that detract from the importance and main purpose that could be easily avoided with further proofreading. For instance, in the second sentence along the work “projected” is used twice. Their inconsistent use of Oxford commas was also noted.
   **Response:** Thank you. The paper has now been proof-read professionally by a native English writer