Author's response to reviews

Title: A qualitative exploration of the perceptions and information needs of public health inspectors responsible for food safety

Authors:

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Version: 5 Date: 15 June 2010

Author's response to reviews: see over
Tuesday, June 15, 2010

I am submitting a revised version the manuscript entitled “A qualitative exploration of the perceptions and information needs of public health inspectors responsible for food safety” to be considered for publication in BMC Public Health. The list of authors in the manuscript is now written exactly as they are in the submission system, and the manuscript has been reviewed for typographical errors. The original link provided in the References section for “Unpasteurized Milk Poses Great Health Risk” is functioning; the URL listed in the last e-mail correspondence was incomplete (missing “6.html” at the end).

The manuscript has not been previously published, nor accepted for publication elsewhere, and is not under consideration by another publication. I also certify that all of the authors have approved the revised paper for release and are in agreement with its content.

The paper demonstrates the results of a series of focus group discussions conducted in Ontario, Canada, that explored public health inspectors’ perceptions of the key food safety issues of concern to public health, and their opinions and needs with regards to food safety information resources. As such this paper should be of interest to a broad readership including those interested in focus group research, qualitative research methods, food safety, and public health.

Thank you for your consideration. Please address all correspondence concerning this manuscript to me at the University of Guelph and feel free to correspond with me by e-mail (phamm@uoguelph.ca).

Sincerely,

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Authors’ response to reviewers:
We thank the reviewers for their supportive and helpful comments. Our responses to specific comments are included in italics below.

Reviewer's report

Title: A Qualitative Exploration of the Perceptions and Information Needs of Public Health Inspectors Responsible for Food Safety

Version: 1 Date: 5 March 2010

Reviewer: Heather Yeatman

Reviewer's report:

Reviewer’s comments
Article: A qualitative exploration of the perceptions and information needs of public health inspectors responsible for food safety.

This is a very interesting and well written paper. The approach was sound and the topic area of relevance to public health. The detail reported in the Results should be shortened, as it would be of only limited interest to a majority of readers and more analysis of the results could be undertaken and presented in the Discussion. Overall, the paper reports on a sound piece of research and is clearly written.

The Results section has been shortened and some details have been removed. Further analyses of the results have been presented in the Discussion.

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
The purpose of the research was clearly articulated on page 4.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
The methods were very appropriate and were well described on pages 5-6.

3. Are the data sound?
The data are sound and are well illustrated using direct quotes from the focus groups. The results section is very detailed and would benefit from being more concise – currently the detail is useful for a small group of readers who are involved in developing programs for these professionals, but that level of detail is not required by the majority of readers.

The Results section has been revised to be more concise and some details have been removed.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition? yes

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
The discussion section is well written and is well connected with the relevant literature. The discussion could also position the findings at a more strategic level, eg the need to monitor the
interpretation of food standards to ensure consistency of implementation and to minimise food handlers’ confusion. 

As per reviewer suggestion, a discussion of these points has been included in the Discussion.

The conclusion should be reconsidered. There are some interesting insights from this study that are not reflected in the conclusion, eg need for centralised support for education materials and to ensure consistency of interpretation of standards. 

As per review suggestion, the Conclusion has been revised.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated? Yes

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished? Yes

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found? Yes,

9. Is the writing acceptable? 
Very clearly written. Only minor grammatical issues:

# P. 3, first sentence of Background, “…. analysis by Campbell ….”
Corrected, as per reviewer suggestion (page 3, second sentence of Background).

# P. 9, last line “… participant who said: ….” 
Corrected, as per reviewer suggestion (page 9, line 11).

# P. 10, 3rd line “Lack of consistency. Several participants cited lack of consistency …..”
Corrected, as per reviewer suggestion (page 9, line 14).

# Results inconsistently refers to participants as their specific gender “he” or “she”, or as “he/she” – eg page 14, lines 8 & 10. Other occurrences of this inconsistency need to be checked.
Corrected, as per reviewer suggestion.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests: 
'I declare that I have no competing interests'
Reviewer's report

Title: A Qualitative Exploration of the Perceptions and Information Needs of Public Health Inspectors Responsible for Food Safety

Version: 1 Date: 6 April 2010

Reviewer: Junehee Kwon

Reviewer's report:

Revision of Results section: Major compulsory revisions.

Many quotes could be extracted into key ideas rather than spelling out everything. This reviewer does not find these quotes helpful or informative. More concise “extraction” of themes may be needed – current version is not well organized but lists items and quotes in a loose framework. I think less than one half of quotes may be needed in the main document. This reviewer suggests limiting direct quotes that give unique and representative ideas.

As per the reviewer’s suggestion, many of the direct quotes have been extracted or paraphrased when appropriate.

Other suggestions regarding grammars etc.: Minor essential revisions.

Corrected, as per reviewers’ suggestions.

Several sentences started with “And” and it is not considered as correct grammar for scientific writing. 
Corrected, as per reviewer suggestion.

Authors overuse “:” throughout documents. Some are not needed and others could be replaced by commas (,). Consider revising.
Corrected, as per reviewer suggestion.

Please see the pdf file attached to this review.
Reviewer’s comments from the pdf file have been copy-and-pasted below.

p. 7, line 12 (second paragraph): Consider adding what authors perception of this response. I understand that the person said “everything” in lieu of all pathogens, but as written, it does not convey clearly. I would suggest having a supplemental statement after the quote to clarify. This sentence has been reworded to provide more clarity (page 7, lines 2-5).

p. 7, line 13 (third paragraph): Consider revising. Grammatically incorrect. Do not use “:” or break the sentence into two sentences for clarity. Corrected, as per reviewer suggestion (page 7, lines 6-8).
p. 8, line 2 (first paragraph): You mentioned two types of responses RE handwashing: One being the greatest complaints from the public and the other being improper handwashing. How about when to wash hands and frequency handwashing? It is difficult to conceive handwashing related issues being only limited to two of issues address in the paper. *Three types of responses regarding handwashing were mentioned in this paragraph. The issue of insufficient handwashing – which includes when to wash hands and handwashing frequency – is addressed in the response regarding the lack of handwashing by food handlers even in the presence of a PHI during a food premise inspection (page 7, lines 6-17).*

p. 8, line 5 (second paragraph): Then (if no elaboration given) how could you say that this was the major issues? Any examples brought by the participants? Please expand. *This section has been reworded and expanded (page 7, last paragraph).*

p. 8, line 9 (third paragraph): Consider revising to be concise. I think authors can paraphrase this quote rather than spelling out all the details verbatim. *As per reviewer suggestion, this paragraph has been revised to be more concise (page 8, first paragraph, line 4).*

p. 9, line 1 (first paragraph): For inspectors? It was not clear until I read the responses for the lack of information is pertaining to the inspectors not food handlers. *Corrected, as per reviewer suggestion (page 8, line 15).*

p. 9, line 16 & 19 (second paragraph): Not sure why grade 8 educated is in bracket. Did the participant say it or not? Please clarify. I think this quote can be also concisely summarized rather than spelling out all the quotes which are not significant nor put into correct grammar. *As per review suggestion, this quote has been summarized in the text (page 9, line 6).*

p. 11, line 15 (second paragraph): To this reviewer, this second concern about pathogen does not address the authors’ original question. This type of responses should be addressed but not with the original question RE emerging pathogen of concern. *While this second concern may not inherently answer the authors’ original question, it was how many of the focus group participants responded to the question. The heading of the section and the introductory sentence have been revised for better fit and clarity (page 10, last paragraph).*

p. 12, line 12 (second paragraph): I agree with the second group of results as quoted by your participants. Food inspectors may not be the right people to investigate emerging pathogens. They do not have any way to pin-point what the problem organisms are until laboratory verification. However, the this type of response does not seem to fit with the heading, “Pathogens of concern to food safety”. *The heading has been changed to “Concern with Foodborne Pathogens” and the opening sentence has been revised (page 10, last paragraph).*

p. 12, line 17 (third paragraph): No need for “;” *Corrected, as per reviewer suggestion (page 11, last paragraph).*
p. 12, line 21 (fourth paragraph): No need for “:”. I think authors overuse : throughout the document. Many are not necessary.
Corrected, as per reviewer suggestion.

p. 14, last line: Not sure what “sic” is.
There are actually 36 health units in Ontario, rather than the 32 stated by the respondent. The use of “[sic]” was to denote that the quoted material has been reproduced verbatim and is not a transcription error (page 13, last paragraph).

p. 15, line 2 (first paragraph): I would not consider this appropriate language to be included in the scientific document. Are you including this quote to show their “frustration”? This quote was included because it demonstrates the intensity with which the respondent made the comment and felt about the topic. As such, we have chosen not to remove this quote; however, if the Editor deems the language inappropriate, it can be excluded (page 13, last line).

p. 15, line 7 (second paragraph): From this point on, this reviewer did not make specific comments as many are repetitive – please review the general comments provided. Again, ideas are very loosely constructed.
The authors have made revisions to the Results and Discussion sections to provide more structure in the presentation of ideas.

p. 23, line 17 (third paragraph): This sentence is irrelevant to this current study. Please remove. Please state as the results may be used in the subsequent quantitative research investigation…
We respectfully disagree. We feel it is important for authors to “clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished”, as is described in Reviewer #1’s report (page 22, line 7).

p. 24, line 1: Since your purpose is not to generalize, does it matter to have balanced number of participants from each unit? This reviewer feels this statement unnecessary.
Corrected, as per reviewer suggestion.

p. 24, line 4 (second paragraph): Actually, that is one of the point of focus groups. If you don’t want them to change their mind or adjust, individual interview should have been employed. I don’t think this was one of limitations of your study.
We respectfully disagree. The wording, however, has been revised to be clearer. The authors intended to convey that some respondents may not have expressed their own personal opinions as a result of others present at the discussion. That is, some respondents may have adjusted what they said to conform to popular opinion or to a particular group member (page 22, line 16).

p. 24, line 16 (conclusion): Since these cannot (by definition of focus groups being qualitative nature) reflect others’ opinions, consider revising statements as you acknowledge this limitation. Assuming it “could” reflect others’ opinion contradict your original assumption of focus groups. This study can provide “some” basis for developing resources but should not by only basis for development.
This section has been reworded as per reviewer suggestion (page 23).


Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests: No competing interests.