Author’s response to reviews

Title: Rural-urban differences in neonatal mortality in a least developed province of China

Authors:

Bin Yi (447390763@qq.com)
Li Wu (wulistart@163.com)
Hong Liu (595732126@qq.com)
Weimin Fang (www.wuli0160.net@163.com)
Yang Hu (annread1985@163.com)
Youjie Wang (wangyoujie@mails.tjmu.edu.cn)

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Author’s response to reviews:

Dear editor

We very much appreciate the careful reading of our manuscript and valuable suggestions of the reviewer. We have carefully considered the comments and have revised the manuscript accordingly.

Response to reviewer of Susan Hughes

Major compulsory revisions

Reviewer’s comments 1. The entire paper needs grammatical, sentence structure, and English language revisions.

Author’s response The entire paper was revised by the authors, and we got the professional editing service of EDANZ. We resubmitted the revised manuscript with edit tracked copy for editors to follow the changes we made in the manuscript.

Reviewer’s comments 2a. Unclear why death registry is not used and a sample of data is better.

Author’s response At present, the notification to death registry system in China is not compulsory and the data of death registry are not complete. The under reporting of neonatal death is common for the neonate died out of hospital in the rural areas of China. But the notification of death of child under five years old in the surveillance site is compulsory. The doctor or parents are required to report the death to the Children Death Surveillance System. Thus the data from the Children Death Surveillance System is thought to be complete and reliable.

Reviewer’s comments 2b. Also unclear what all the variables collected are;

Author’s response The variables extracted from the death card were listed in the part of method. They were sex, birth date, birth-weight, gestational age, death date, death cause, place of death, hospitalization or not, with or without treatment before death, and the criteria of diagnosis.
Reviewer’s comments 2c. Data Analysis - Are you using Poisson 95% confidence intervals?

Author’s response No, we did not use Poisson distribution to estimate 95% confidence interval. In this study, the number of neonatal death cases was large, so the Poisson distribution should be very close to the normal distribution. We calculated 95% CI in this study based on the normal distribution.

Reviewer’s comments 2d. It is unclear what information the rate ratio is adding that isn't obvious from just the death rates with confidence intervals.

Author’s response In this paper, rate ratio were the ratio of rural neonatal death rate and urban neonatal death rate. We calculated the rate ratio to compare relative risk of rural-urban neonatal death.

Reviewer’s comments 3 Results section: Organized unconventionally making it difficult to follow; should start with Table 3 describing your groups, then move into Table 1 mortality rates.

Author’s response We thought it is logical to make the arrangement of tables in this paper. Table 1 described the difference on total neonatal death rate of rural and urban babies. Table 2 described the difference on cause-specific neonatal death of rural and urban neonates. Table 3 further described the difference on the characteristics of neonatal death of rural and urban neonates.

Reviewer’s comments 4 Table 4 is difficult to understand.

Author’s response Table 4 showed the proportion of neonatal death in infant death, and in children death under 5 five years old. A large proportion of infant and under-five deaths occur soon after birth, in the neonatal period. Globally, the lower the child mortality, the higher the proportion of deaths that occur before the age of four weeks, as under-five mortality is easier to reduce. The lower proportion of neonatal death in child mortality in rural areas in Gansu province suggested the poorer children health status.

Reviewer’s comments 5 Discussion - too much repetition of results, could be considerably shortened.

Author’s response We accepted the reviewer’s suggestion and shortened the part of discussion, we deleted the last paragraph in the conclusion part

Minor essential revisions

Reviewer’s comments 6 Spell out chi-squared

Author’s response We deleted X2 test, and used chi-squared in the manuscript

Reviewer’s comments 7 use % sign

Author’s response We deleted ‰, and used per 1000 live births instead.

Reviewer’s comments 8. Variable definition - last sentence defines rural two times and urban not at all.

Author’s response We changed the first rural into urban.

Reviewer’s comments 9. Data analysis - never used a t-test could remove
reference to it.

Author’s response We deledted t-test

Reviewer's comments 10. Entire paper & tables: too much precision in numbers, only need one digit to right of the decimal point;

Author’s response We accepted reviewer’s suggestion, and kept one digit to right of the decimal point

Reviewer’s comments 11. Consistent use of abbreviation NMR once introduced;

Author’s response We accepted reviewer’s suggestion and use NMR consistently

Reviewer’s comments 12. Table 3 - p-values are never equal to zero, these should be reported as <0.001; normal misspelled in birth weight characteristics.

Author’s response We changed the manuscript according reviewer’s suggestions

Response to reviewer Okechukwu Anyamele

Reviewer’s comments 1. On the Results, page 5, lines 5 and 6, “The rural and urban NMRs declined by 47.7% (from 20.86 to 13.61 per 1000 live births) and 34.8% (from 9.52 to 4.98 per 1000 live births). This should be ”The rural and urban NMRs declined by 34.8% (from 20.86 to 13.61 per 1000 live births) and 47.7% (from 9.52 to 4.98 per 1000 live births).

Author’s response We checked the number and changed the manuscript according reviewer’s suggestion

Reviewer’s comments 2. on line 10 same page, the figure should be 2.35 fold difference and not 2.36.

Author’s response We checked the number and changed according reviewer’s suggestion

Reviewer’s comments 3. on page 4, lines 10 and 11, the authors should state what the code for rural and urban is.

Author’s response The areas coded 100-123 is urban residence and 200-220 is rural residence. We mentioned it in the part of Variable Definition.

Reviewer’s comments 4. on the conclusion page, since the study does not have income as a variable, the word low-income in conclusion should be changed to rural setting.

Author’s response We accepted reviewer’s suggestion and changed the manuscript.