Author's response to reviews

**Title:** Community based needs assessment in an urban area; A participatory action research

**Authors:**

- Saeid Sadeghieh Ahari Dr (s.sadeghiyeh@arums.ac.ir)
- Shahram habibzadeh Dr (s.habibzadeh@arums.ac.ir)
- Moharram yousefi (myousefi1356@yahoo.com)
- firouz amani Dr (f.amani@arums.ac.ir)
- Reza abdi Dr (reabdi@uma.ac.ir)

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**Author's response to reviews:** see over
Author's response to reviews

Title: Community based needs assessment in an urban area; A participatory action research

Authors:
S. Sadeghieh Ahari: s.sadeghiyeh@arums.ac.ir
Sh Habibzadeh: s.habibzadeh@arums.ac.ir
M Yousefi: myousefi1356@yahoo.com
F Amani: f.amani@arums.ac.ir
Reza Abdi: reabdi@uma.ac.ir

Version: 11/2/2011

Author's response to reviews: see over
Reviewer's report

Title: Community based needs assessment in an urban area; A participatory action research

Version: 11/2/2011

Reviewer: Maghboeba Mosavel

Reviewer's report:

1- Overall, I found this paper extremely difficult to read. Much of it was the use of English but another big part contributing to my difficulty was the lack of organization in this paper. The authors clearly have done important work and their approach is interesting and therefore I hope that they will be able rewrite it in such a way as to do justice to their efforts. However, given the lack of organization, clarity and the difficulty of reading this manuscript, I would suggest a major revision is necessary before I can make a decision about the merits of this work. Also, it seems to me, and I could be wrong, that the manuscript was translated directly from the original language, Farsi, but a direct translation simply does not work. There are many sloppy errors with periods missing, or not immediately after the end of the last word in a sentence, etc.

1) The manuscript was extensively edited by a competent colleague in terms of language and academic writing.

2- Methods
I had some concerns here about the presentation and explanation for some of the key concepts. For example, not clear how the community was decided upon the choice of the particular community. It is not clear what research occurred before in Ardabil and how the decision was made to conduct the PAR in this community. Was it community-initiated or demand based. If this information is in the manuscript, it is unclear.

2) This study is demand based (referred to in the second paragraph under Method section).

3- The authors need to differentiate between outcomes and goals. Maybe the authors could have a heading that states "Process" and then explain what the process involved. Again, there were several committees formed to assist with the implementation of this project - the authors need to more clearly delineate the functions of the different committees. Was the executive committee similar to a community advisory board? What is a "string" committee? It was hard to follow.

3-1) The process was more clearly mentioned throughout the Method section and the subsections.

3-2) In terms of the committees, we had a main executive committee which we changed to Steering Committee this time and we had twelve local executive committees in the neighborhoods.

4- Not clear what block meant? Is it similar to a neighborhood?

4) Block refers to neighborhood

5- The methods section very confusing – not sure all the information that they present is needed.

5) The Method section was thoroughly revised.

6- Not clear what they mean by the cut and paste method

6) "cut and paste” was removed and replaced with an explanation.
7- I understand that language was a complex issue - so the discussions took place in Turkish but the notes were recorded in Persian, right? What about the data dissemination - was that in Turkish or Persian. Maybe a section on how language was managed would be helpful.

7-1) The language of the local periodical in which the study was reported was Persian.

7-2) The language issue was elaborated in the only footnote of the manuscript.

8- I am not sure if all the tables are needed.

8) The Tables are revised to be brief, more informative, and reader-friendly.

9- Not clear how the final prioritization of problems were actually addressed.

9) An explanation was added to clarify the scores and final prioritization.

10- Discussion – the discussion includes some issues that were not raised in the methods section.

10) The discussion was revised to match the Introduction and Method sections.

11- Abstract
In first paragraph, the third sentence is clumsily stated "method that implicated." The methods section under the abstract is confusing with several words missing in each of the sentences. And finally, the last sentence under the methods section is incomplete. Background – the authors discuss the I components in this section. In the participatory action research section, the sentence that starts with "through participation in the research process..." is particularly awkward and needs to be restated. Again, I think the authors implemented a very detailed and thoughtful PAR in an interesting context. However, they have not been able to convey this adequately in their written work.

11) The abstract was revised completely.

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

- The manuscript was extensively edited by a competent colleague in terms of language and academic writing.

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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: Community based needs assessment in an urban area; A participatory action research

Version: 11/2/2011
Reviewer: Frances Butterfoss

1) This paper has real merit. Its strength lies in its international setting, participatory approach, large number of participants and multiple methods of assessment. In order to highlight these important findings, the paper must be turned over to a copy editor for whom English is his/her first language. It is not possible to give a fair review of the content when the language is so stilted and ambiguous. THIS IS A MUST!

- The manuscript was extensively edited by a competent colleague in terms of language.

2) Background: This literature review is the strongest part of the paper. In first paragraph, I would omit sentences 5 and 9. The paragraph under Historical Perspective can be omitted and the paragraph on Community Health Needs Assessment Defined could be added to first paragraph. Under Community Participation and Empowerment, I would end sentence one after "...state-level health improvement plans. Under the PAR paragraph, I would omit the last sentence of the first paragraph and introduce the last paragraph of that section in a much clearer way, so that the reader knows that this is the purpose of the article...

- Change made as indicated by the reviewer

3) Methods: This is the most problematic part of the paper. Move description of the the population, setting and environmental issues under Study Design and Community Selection to come before the Methods section right after the purpose paragraph. Then, under Methods, get right to the point of describing what methods were used (most of which is contained under Methods of Data Collection).

In other words, describe the needs assessment process - the focus groups and the surveys. The whole issue of language challenges can be addressed under Discussion - just mention the languages used here. After a full description of the methods themselves, then you can provide a shorter description of what made these methods participatory processes (see paragraphs on Inviting the attention and participation of the members of community development center and Knowledge transfer and empowerment).

The primary and secondary outcomes should be shortened and moved to the purpose paragraph before this section as described above. The challenges of doing this work (described in paragraph after the secondary outcomes) should be moved to the Discussion.

The entire Methods section needs to be crystallized and shortened so that readers know exactly what was done and when. A figure featuring a timeline would help here (planning, selection of communities, focus groups, workshops for questionnaire development, survey, analysis, feedback). I would omit paragraphs 4 and 5 under Methods of Data Collection (beginning with "It is necessary obviously the the answer..."). Just get to the point, what question was asked of participants in the focus groups! Under the same section, move the description of the sampling to its own heading (begins with "The community enquirers..."). Finally, under Method of Data Analysis, this should only involve the 3rd and 4th paragraphs. The first and second paragraphs can be shortened and added to Discussion section. Similarly, the reliability and Ethics paragraphs can be moved to the Discussion Section under Limitations or become part of the methods section that covers Participatory Process.

- The Method section was thoroughly revised as indicated by the reviewer

- The discussion was revised totally
4) Results: Omit paragraph 1. Omit Table 1 entirely. Table 2 easily summarized the identified problems. I would list [problems in first column (Left justified), followed by a column of frequency in decreasing order as you have done - I would omit rank. After Table 2, you describe in one sentence the prioritization process using seriousness, urgency and feasibility of solving in one sentence. This is the crux of the study and should have been described in detail under Methods of Data Analysis. Then, Table 3 would make sense - as it stands the reader does not understand how the Total Scores were derived. Again, in Table 3, list the Rank, Problem (Left Justified and first word capitalized), and then the total score in columns. The two paragraphs after Table 3 should be included in Discussion under heading of Future Research.

4-1) The Tables are revised to be brief, more informative, and reader-friendly.

4-2) An explanation was added to clarify the scores of the Table 3

5) The paragraphs under "Short Summary of Results from Research" should be shortened and moved to Discussion section.

5) The problematic sections including short summary was eliminated.

6) The section entitled "Informing people about results" should be part of section on Participatory Research Process or included in Discussion.

6) Change made as indicated by the reviewer

7) Discussion: Since I suggest that many other parts of this paper belong in this section, it will have to be totally revised - I recommend a numbers set of paragraphs that are focused and clear.

7) Conclusion was revised to incorporate the basic achievements.

8) The conclusion is weak, but could be expanded a bit to bring home the lessons of PAR, namely mutual cooperation, respect, capacity building and empowerment.

• Change made as indicated by the reviewer

9-References: Use consistent format, especially for online sources.

• For reference writing, we used endnote software with BMC public health journal option.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field
Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited
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
Thank you for the opportunity to review this paper, reporting on a Community Health Assessment undertaken in Northwest Iran. The project was conducted using a participatory approach, which engaged a large number of community members in data collection, analysis, and prioritization of issues. Community members were considered equal partners in the process and gained skills, as well as knowledge, through their participation.

It is very important to publish reports of participatory research projects, and this study provides an outstanding example of how researchers can engage with communities in the assessment phase of research. The manuscript as currently written, however, is difficult to follow. It needs to be revised so that its key points can be conveyed to readers. Here are my suggestions:

1. The paper needs to be more structured and focused to follow the conventional format for scientific papers, which is below:

   1) The manuscript was extensively revised and edited by a competent colleague in terms of language.

2-. Background
   i. This section should begin with a statement of the problem, which is not clearly stated. Is it that CHAs are not done or that CHAs are poorly done? It appears that you recommend the use of participatory methods in CHAs but this is not clearly stated.
   ii. This section should end with a clear statement of your purpose. Currently, there is a purpose statement under “methods” (page 5, primary outcome of study) and other one in “findings” (page 10). I like the purpose on page 10 best. The reader needs to know the purpose earlier in the paper, and it should link to the problem statement.
   iii. Currently, this section includes entire paragraphs on the history and definitions of CHA and PAR. CHA is defined on page 2 and page 5. Although it is important to provide your definitions to the reader, this part of the Background can be streamlined considerably.

   2) The sections of the study were totally reviewed and revised.

3- Method
   • The Method section was thoroughly revised.
   i. The first sentence implies that you will analyze your work against a theory, but which theory? There was no section on theory in the Background. Perhaps you just mean that your method followed the steps of PAR.
      • The section under primary and secondary outcome was removed and the points were built into the manuscript.
   ii. I do not know what the phrase “demand-orientates” means. Can this be explained, or another word used?
      • Change made as indicated by the reviewer. This study is demand based (referred to in the second paragraph under Method section).
iii. The primary and secondary outcomes are admirable, but are they really outcomes? The primary outcome is akin to your purpose. The secondary outcomes appear to be the “steps” you took in your project. Thus, you could say…”Our purpose is to provide an example of using PAR to conduct a CHA in a rural community of a developing country”….and “Our method included these steps: 1) initiate attention and participation 2) establish the executive or steering cmte 3) teach community members to collect data; 4) conduct community meetings in 12 neighborhoods 5) work with community representatives to develop a questionnaire based on findings from the community meetings; 6) administer the questionnaire to 600 families in 12 neighborhoods; 7) engage with community to analyze, interpret, and prioritize the findings; and 8) disseminating the findings.” Each step becomes a subheader under methods, and will help you organize the text. This part of the paper is very important because it tells the reader how to replicate your excellent method.

- The section under primary and secondary outcome was removed and the points were built into the manuscript.
- The process was more clearly mentioned throughout the Method section and the subsections.

iv. Please clarify if the Executive Committee, the Steering Committee, and the Prioritization Committee were comprised of the same people or if they were 3 different committees. It is not clear in the writing.
- In terms of the committees, we had a main executive committee which we changed to Steering Committee this time and we had twelve local executive committees in the neighborhoods.

c. Results
i. This section should not start with the purpose. Rather, it should be limited to presenting the findings from your data collection.
ii. Tables 1, 2, and 3 are good.
iii. For Table 3, be sure to tell the reader how you arrived at the scores (like 2508.3). In the methods, you report that the members of the committee agreed upon weights for each criterion. So when and how was the weight applied, and what was the weight applied to?
- The Tables are revised to be brief, more informative, and reader-friendly.
- An explanation was added to clarify the scores of the Table 3

iv. It is very interesting that the Executive Committee suggested a study on rubbish disposal, when this was priority 5, not priority 1. Why is that?
- Because there was a person in the community with postgraduate degree in the field of environmental science that was interested in this field.

v. The section titled “Here follows a very short summary of the results” fit better under the discussion.
- The problematic sections including short summary was eliminated and moved to the discussion section.

vi. The section titled “Informing people about results” could be moved to the methods section under step 8 (dissemination).
- Change made as indicated by the reviewer

d. Discussion
i. Merge information from the section titled “Here follows a very short summary of the results” with the discussion, and streamline this section.
- Change made as indicated by the reviewer
2. The writing is somewhat awkward. I image that English is not the first language of the authors. They should consider engaging a co-author or editor who can polish the writing so that it is clearer.

- The manuscript was extensively revised and edited by a competent colleague in terms of language.

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field
Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited
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: Community based needs assessment in an urban area; A participatory action research

Version: 11/2/2011

Reviewer: Barbara L Dancy

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
The primary and secondary purposes are presented on page 10 in the 'Results' section. The outcomes on page 5 need to be integrated with the purpose.
The 'Background' section should contain information that is directly applicable to the study's purpose.
- The sections of the study were totally reviewed and revised.
- The section under primary and secondary outcome was removed and the points were built into the manuscript.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
A more clear articulation is needed on the three phases of data analysis. More information is needed on how the qualitative data was analyzed. No information is provided on the number of individuals in each of the focus group discussions. Superficial information is provided on the participants' involvement in data collection and analysis other than to say that they were involved.
- The Method section was thoroughly revised.
- The number of individuals in each of the focus group discussions explained in the Method of Data Collection section

3. Are the data sound?
There is no demographic description of the research participants.
The Cronbach alpha is listed as a percent.
  • corrected

The 'Results' section is poorly organized.
  • The Tables are revised to be brief, more informative, and reader-friendly.
  • An explanation was added to clarify the scores of the Table 3.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition? No.
5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

The 'Discussion' section lacks focus.
  • The sections of the study were totally reviewed and revised.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated? No.
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?
   This manuscript is poorly written with incomplete sentences, misspelled words and awkward sentence structure. As such, it is extremely difficult to follow. While there are some good points made in this manuscript, they are not easily recognized due to the incoherent style that the manuscript is written.
  • The manuscript was extensively revised and edited by a competent colleague in terms of language.

All comments fall within the Major Compulsory Revisions category.
Level of interest: An article of limited interest
Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited
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