Author's response to reviews

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

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

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Version: 15/1/2012

Reviewer: Frances Butterfoss

All edits are contained in the Word file that I will email are major compulsory or minor essential revisions and must be done to ensure clarity and integrity of this article.

• All the suggested revisions which appeared within the manuscript through Track Changes were applied.

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

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

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

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, however, needs some revision and editing before publication. Here are my suggestions:

1. Abstract. Overall, the abstract is well written. However, it can be improved if you:

a. Add under method that the steering committee included representatives from 12 blocks or districts of the community.

   • The suggested revisions were applied.

b. Add that these representatives were trained and then conducted focus groups in their block, and that focus group findings informed the development of the questionnaire.

   • The suggested revisions were applied.

c. Revise the last sentence of methods as: “each health problem identified by the community was weighted based on the frequency it was selected on the survey, and steering committee perception of the problem’s seriousness, urgency, solvability, and financial load.”

d. Revise the sentence under results about empowerment. I don’t think you can say that your findings increased participation, because you did not measure participation pre and post. You can say something like: “High participation rates of community members in the steering committee and survey suggest that the PAR approach was greatly appreciated by the community and that problems identified through this research truly reflect community opinion.”

   • The suggested revisions were applied.
2. Background. The background section presents some interesting information from the literature. However, it can be streamlined considerably. Here’s how I would revise it into 5 paragraphs.

a. Paragraph 1 – “Assessing community health is a core function of public health. The Future of Public Health recommended that local public health agencies “regularly ….”[3]. “

  • We followed other reviewer’s comments that were similar to your recommend

b. Paragraph 2 – “Definitions of community health assessment (CHA) vary widely. (rest of existing paragraph) CHA should not be confused with a clinical needs assessment, which gathers data from an individual so that a treatment plan can be developed. CHA looks more broadly at community issues and population well-being, recognizing that health is not merely the absence of disease.”

  • Change made as indicated by the reviewer

c. Paragraph 3 – “Training communities to help collect and interpret needs assessment data has many advantages, including increasing feelings of community empowerment [8]. A commitment to community participation and empowerment is at the heart of the WHO…. [10] (rest of existing paragraph).”

  • We followed other reviewer’s comments that were similar to your recommend

d. Paragraph 4 – “Participatory action research (PAR) is an approach that operationalizes the recommendations of WHO for participation. PAR works with a community….. Empowerment, power sharing, and social change are important goals. (rest of existing paragraph).

  • Change made as indicated by the reviewer

e. Paragraph 5 – “The purpose of this paper is to report on a PAR approach to CHA conducted in Ardabil, a city in the northwest of Iran. In this project, researchers from Ardabil Medical University worked with and trained community members to collect and interpret CHA data. This project followed a series of prior activities among the partners. For example, university members had provided community classes, helped facilitate repairs to sewers and pathway lighting consultation, organized sports teams. These activities had developed trust between the university and community, and paved the way for the current project.”

  • We followed other reviewer’s comments that were similar to your recommend

3. Methods – This section also can be streamlined and reorganized for clarity.
a. Study Design. Start with something like: “A community PAR was conducted drawing on theories of community mobilization, participation, and empowerment. The steps included…(something like 1) establish the steering committee 2) decide on methods 3) transfer knowledge 4) collect data and 5) interpret data and prioritize needs.”

• Change made as indicated by the reviewer.

b. Steering Committee. Insert your paragraph on “involving CDC and selecting executives,” and then give an overview of mixed methods data collection methods—first focus groups and then questionnaire (move this from page 9).

• We followed other reviewer's comments that were similar to your recommend

c. Knowledge Transfer. Insert your paragraph on “knowledge transfer.”

• We followed other reviewer's comments that were similar to your recommend

d. Methods of Data Collection. This section is good, but please clarify 1) if and how focus group findings informed the development of the questionnaire and 2) the types of questions on the questionnaire (for example, you say there were 60 items….but were 10 demographic items? Were some attitude items? Or did you just give respondents with a list of 60 problems to rank? How was each problem scored…was it “yes or no” or did you have a scale?

• Change made as indicated by the reviewer.

e. Methods of Data Analysis. Information on the weighting of the results appears here and then again on pages 11 and 12. Please consolidate all the information into this section. Also, define what you mean by financial load, for example do you mean “cost to fix to problem” or do you mean “cost benefit to the people if the problem were fixed” or what? It would be helpful to provide an example of how the scoring worked. For asphalt, for example, did 300 people check it, and then you multiplied by 8.6, 7.5, 5.5, and 4.8 to get 2508.3? When did you apply the 1-100 number mentioned on page 11?

• Change made as indicated by the reviewer.

4. Results – This section is OK, but move the information about weighing from this section to the methods section, as mentioned above. Also, the next-to-last paragraph belongs in the discussion section.

• We applied the comment on the Result section.

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field
Reviewer's report

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Reviewer: Barbara L Dancy

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?

The primary and secondary purposes are stated in the ‘Results’ section. On page 5, there is an indication of the purpose, but the purpose should be clearly stated before the “Methods” section. Pages 3-5 are not coherently organized and don’t provide sufficient rationale for determining the community health assessment. What is the significance of the community health assessment? Why is the historical perspective included? What does the historical perspective offer in terms of laying the foundation for the purpose?

• The suggested revisions in the Background and Method and were fully applied.
• 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?

The PAR is the methodology used to conduct the community health assessment. The steps of the PAR are delineated in the ‘Methods’ section. The description of the steps is a strength. It would have been helpful to provide information on the numerous difficulties encountered in conducting the PAR. How many people attended the focus group workshops for two months? What were the retention rates for the focus group workshops? How many people participated in the development of the questionnaire? The authors reported that “after 14 days” the questionnaire administration was repeated to check reliability. This sounds like test-retest reliability, but the authors reported a Cronbach alpha.

• The Method section of the study were reviewed and revised.
• Problem about Cronbach alpha was corrected.

3. Are the data sound?

Mixed model was introduced in the “Method of Data Analysis”. Provide more information on mixed model. The discussion of the data analysis lack sufficient detail; it seems that descriptive statistics were used, but this was not stated in this section. How was it decided that only five main problems would be identified? The discussion of the application of weights to the problems was confusing. The “Results” section continues to be poorly organized; it is not clear if the primary and secondary purposes were achieved. Research questions for each purpose would help in the organization of the results. What are the demographic characteristics of the 600 people? It is not clear how the five leading priorities in Table1 are related to the 22 problems in Tables 2 and 3.

• An explanation was added to clarify weights to the problems the scores
• We applied the comment on the Result section.
• We added some explanation about our limitation in collection demographic factors.
• We added some explanation about result table one in page 8 paragraph 3.

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

• We tried to correct the problem or improvements.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

The “Discussion” section is superficial and doesn’t adequately cover the lessons learned in conducting PAR, the types of barriers that need to be overcome, how
the authors overcame the barriers, etc.

• The sections of the study were totally reviewed and revised.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
No.
• We added some explanation in relation to study limitations.

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?
The writing is much improved, but there is still awkward sentence structure throughout the manuscript. A person whose first language is English needs to edit this manuscript.

All comments fall within the Major Compulsory revisions category.

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

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests
Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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

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

Declaration of competing interests:
'I declare that I have no competing interests.'