Author's response to reviews

Title: Nutritional and health status among nursing home residents in Lebanon: comparison across gender in a national cross sectional study.

Authors:

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Version: 4 Date: 17 April 2014

Author's response to reviews: see over
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Title: Nutritional and health status among nursing home residents in Lebanon: comparison across gender in a national cross sectional study.

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Additional Editorial Request:

1.) Kindly clarify in your manuscript whether your study has received ethics approval and by which committee.

JD: We explained the ethics approval in the section Methods (study design and setting).

Comments to the reviewers

Version 2: Date 24 February 2014

Reviewer: Raildo S Coqueiro

Minor essential revisions:

Methods (Interview and medical dossier):
- p. 7 - “Individuals describing their health as very poor are screened out and not included in this study.” ... This should be included in the exclusion criteria.

JD: We made the suggested modification and added this exclusion criterion.

Methods (Anthropometric measurements):
- Provide the fabricants and countries of the used equipments.
JD: We made the suggested modification and added the fabricants and countries for both equipments in the section Methods (Anthropometric measurements).

- The measure of the stature needs to be better described. How were the participants positioned (feet, calves, buttocks, back)? Was the head positioned in the Frankfurt plane?

JD: We added the suggested information in the section Methods (Anthropometric measurements).

- The results (Table 2) for BMI classification are presented, but this classification has not been described in the methods. Please indicate the reference cutoff points used for BMI.

JD: we made the suggested modification in the section Methods (Anthropometric measurements).

Results (Nutritional status and health characteristics)

- Please, review **Figure 1**. It seems incorrect. Apparently it expresses the general distribution of the comorbidities (yes or no) and not the distribution according to gender, as the description indicates.

JD: The figure represented the distribution of gender among those elderly who had the disease.

Results (Functional ability, psychological status and social contact):

- p. 10: “Males report a higher level of functional ability in comparison to women for all the ADL components except continence.”... Considering that statistics only indicated difference for bathing and dressing, it is not possible to affirm this.

JD: We added the suggested modification.

Discretionary revisions:

Discussion (Limitations):

- I do not agree with the third limitation (cross-sectional design) pointed by the authors. I believe that this limitation does not apply to the study. First, because the study is descriptive and cross-sectional design serves this purpose very well.

Secondly, because the only independent variable considered in hypothesis testing was gender. As gender is a non-modifiable factor, there is no possibility of reverse causality.
JD: We removed the third limitation as suggested.

- In the same way the authors recognized the limitations of the study, I suggest they should point its strong points

JD: we added the strong points of the study as requested in the section Discussion (strengths).

Reviewer: Sanada- Reviewer's report:

Version 2: Date 10 March 2014

Major Compulsory Revisions
This descriptive cross-sectional study was done to explore nutritional and health status among nursing home residents using nation-wide surveillance. This study provides basic status of the elderly people in Lebanon and unveils the health disparity between genders. However, the study purpose was unclear and rationale of this study was too weak. Major flaws in description hinder its significance.

Major comments
What is the purpose to compare the nutritional and socio-economic status between genders? There was no description of the rationale of this survey in the introduction section. Lack of nationwide study regarding the gender difference does not solely qualify the rationale of the study. Some of the reasons are described in the discussion section, thus the reviewer recommends the author to restructure the manuscript.

JD: We made the suggested modification and restructured the manuscript.

There are so many drop-out for the study population. The reviewer suggests the author to include participant flow diagram to indicate how many individuals were excluded for each criteria.

JD: We made the suggested modification and included figure 1 for the flow diagram.

Authors need to explain the reasons for exclusion criteria, which significantly reduced the eligible number of participants, which made it extremely difficult to generalize the results this study with limited number of participants has obtained.

JD: In this study, we selected elderly who were mentally and physically able to interact with field researchers because data was collected through interviews.
In general, it is not meaningful to survey the individual income for elderly resident in nursing homes because they are already retired and their economic status is strongly affected by the former jobs and their family economic status. It is unclear how the authors regard the income in this situation.

JD: we removed the individual income for elderly from the study.

In the discussion section, there are many speculative explanation of the results which are not based on the analysis. Although this study just provided the descriptive statistics for nutritional and socio-economic status as well as health status, the authors explained the relationship between these variables which seems to mislead the understanding of the relationship. Discussion parts should be described on the basis of scientifically obtained results.

JD: We made the suggested modification and rewrote the discussion.

**Minor comments**
The abstract includes unexplained abbreviations which are not allowed to appear in the abstract. Also some unnecessary expressions are found (e.g. This study sheds the light on this important issue). Be specific to describe the study contents in minimum sentences.

JD: We made the suggested modification.

The authors need to state that this observational study was approved by the ethics committee.

JD: We made the suggested modification and added the ethics approval in the section Methods (study design and setting).

For MNA, what is the reason why the authors classified at risk and malnutrition into abnormal?

JD: we removed “abnormal” from the text. We considered both at risk of malnutrition and malnutrition as one group “malnourished/abnormal” because the number of malnourished residents was very small.

There is a repetition of data regarding MNA in table 2:

JD: we removed the repeated data from table 2.

For exclusion criteria, why were individuals describing their health as very poor not included in this study?

JD: Elderly of very poor health were neither able nor willing to participate in this study.
There are many examples of non-standard grammar. The authors would benefit from professional editing. Unnecessary repetitions for abbreviated words are seen throughout the manuscript.

JD: we made the suggested modifications throughout the manuscript.

Also, there are so many repetitions for the result section, which is only a mere statement of numbers in the tables, especially for table 1.
JD: we made the suggested modifications and removed the numbers.

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited
JD: we made the suggested modifications throughout the manuscript.