Author’s response to reviews

Title: Handheld Computers for Self-Administered Sensitive Data Collection: A Comparative Study in Peru

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Author’s response to reviews: see over
Dear editors,

BMC Medical Informatics and Decision Making

I’m writing, on behalf of my co-authors Walter H Curioso MPH, Marco A Gonzales, Wilfredo Evangelista, Jesus M Castagnetto PhD, Cesar P Carcamo PhD, James Hughes PhD, Patricia J Garcia MPH, Geoff P. Garnett PhD, King K Holmes PhD, and myself to response the comments of reviewers about the manuscript ID 1032255907152872

Responses to the First Reviewer:
The first reviewer accepts the second version of the manuscript without revision.

Responses to the Second Reviewer:

Major compulsory revisions

As stated in the first review, the authors did not develop an open source program. They developed a software program using open source tools. But this is very much not the same thing. The author’s statement that the major strength of their study was the use of open source software for collecting data is incorrect, as was pointed out in the first review. Did the authors make their source code is available to others? Did the authors allow others to use, change, and improve the software, as well as to redistribute it in modified or unmodified form? If these questions are not true, then the authors did not develop an open source program.

Some changes have been made in the manuscript to accomplish the suggestions of the reviewer. They are as follows:

Abstract:
Methods: “A PDA-based program for data collection was developed using Open-Source tools”.
Conclusion: “This study has demonstrated that it is feasible to develop a low-cost application for handheld computers, and that PDAs are feasible alternatives for collecting field data in a developing country”.

Methods:
“The PDA software program was built using Open-Source tools and contained the same sequence of questions as the paper format”.

Discussion:
“The major strength of this study is the application of a PDA software program using Open Source tools for collecting data, and two different methodologies to evaluate it, which allows us to develop a low-cost system, tailored more closely to our needs and specifications without the limitations of proprietary systems. To our knowledge, this is the first report that evaluates the usefulness of using a software program built with Open Source tools in a PDA to collect data about sexual behavior in the field in Peru”.
“The use of programs based on Open Source tools has been previously described in rural areas [30] to allow paramedical health workers to view large databases. Using these tools, other authors have developed databases and web-applications for collecting, storing, and querying biological pathway data or managing information in biomedical studies”.

The term “almost perfect” at the start of the discussion section is subjective, especially to those not familiar with (or who do not agree with) Landis and Koch. A more accurate statement might be that their kappa coefficient of (put value here) suggests an almost perfect agreement between paper and PDA responses.
This change has been made. Now the paragraph is: “The results of the first survey show an overall kappa coefficient of 0.86 suggesting an almost perfect agreement between PDA and paper responses [19]. This finding supports the utility of PDA-PREVEN for collecting survey data in the field”.

The critical flaw in the study design is that of recall bias. The variation between the handheld computer and paper-based surveys may all be simply due to this effect. The same variation might have been present if the participants were asked to fill out paper-based surveys twice (or handheld computers surveys twice). This was noted in the first review, and the authors’ addressed this in their review. However, their statement in the second of the last paragraph of page 10 is not based on their data and cannot be substantiated in any way. Although this was not the authors’ intent, this sentence seems to dismiss what is the most important limitation of their research.

Changes have been made in this section, sorting the limitations in accordance with the suggestions of the reviewer.

Minor essential revisions
The word “etc” in the last paragraph of page 5 should have a period after it.
This change has been made.

In accordance with the corrections and suggestions of reviewers, we look forward to and appreciate your consideration for publication. Please feel free to contact Antonio Bernabe-Ortiz, MD, with any questions, at (511) 9506-0550 or email 03887@upch.edu.pe or abernabeo@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

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