Reviewer's report

Title: The use of mobile phones as a data collection tool: A report from a household survey in South Africa

Version: 1 Date: 21 July 2009

Reviewer: Walter H. Curioso

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Review of “The use of mobile phones as a data collection tool: A report from a household survey in South Africa.”

Major essential revisions
There are several publications that report the use of mobile phones (and other mobile devices) as a data collection tool. This article should be reviewed and re-submitted as a research article rather than as a technical advance.

Background:
On page 3, last paragraph; the paper states that “mobile phone technology has been used as a healthcare intervention for chronic, non-communicable diseases;” but reference 5 cited is related to fixed phones, not mobile phones. In addition, reference 7 is related to PDAs, not mobile phones. There are many other reasons of the use of mobile phones for public health purposes. Authors might review and cite examples of mobile health applications from the following report:


On page 4, second paragraph; the paper states that “to the best of our knowledge the use of mobile phones as a data collection tool in low and middle countries has not been described.” I cannot agree with this statement. Authors might refer to several papers related to this issue. For example, authors might review and cite:


In addition, authors might review and cite some examples from the “mHealth for Development” report.
Methods
Figure 1. Some screenshots can not be read very well. The authors could improve the screenshots.

Training.
Mean age of community health workers (CHW) is reported; therefore, standard deviation should be reported. In order to help the reader understand the context, it would help to have other details regarding mobile phone use (e.g. SMS, phone calls), if available: How many CHW were regular SMS users? Do older adults use it much or is it primarily by young adults? All these quantitative data should be reported under results.

Results
Surveys
It seems that this section is incomplete. Average time to complete the surveys should be reported.

Second paragraph: How the authors define an inconsistency? How many inconsistencies were detected? Authors should include a description about inconsistencies in methods.

On page 8, second paragraph; the paper states that “we were able to detect an instance of data fabrication on the day that it occurred.” It’s not clear for the reader if there was only one data fabrication or more. Authors should clarify this issue.

Discussion
On page 9, first paragraph, the paper states that “This is a significant cost savings.” This might be true, but not data is reflected in the results.

On page 9, last paragraph, the paper states that “the Mobile Researcher system is a significantly cheaper option.” This might be true, but not data to support this statement is presented in the results.

On page 10, third paragraph, the paper states that “Mobile phones (like PDA’s).” Authors should note that not all PDA are mobile phones.

There is no discussion of other mobile health devices already implemented in other settings. Authors should discuss other examples of mobile health projects in developing countries.

Authors should discuss advantages/disadvantages of using proprietary vs. open source software, especially in developing countries.

Conclusion
Some sentences in the conclusion are more suitable for the discussion.
Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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