Reviewer's report

Title: Criteria for priority setting of HIV/AIDS interventions in Thailand: A discrete choice experiment

Version: 1 Date: 14 September 2009

Reviewer: Cheryl LL Carling

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Title: BMC Health Services Research Criteria for priority setting of HIV/AIDS interventions in Thailand: A discrete choice experiment

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Version 1

Reviewer: Cheryl LL Carling, 14 Sept 2009

While my area of expertise can be said to include the elicitation and use of preferences in medical decision making, I am somewhat new to DCE and contingent analysis. I appreciate the opportunity to review this article and have accordingly consulted several articles to better familiarise myself with the method.

My comments on this article should be viewed as those of an informed health services researcher, probably very similar to many of the targeted readers of this study.

Reviewer’s comments

The present study used discrete choice experiments (DCE) to elicit stakeholders’ preferences to determine and weight the criteria for priority setting for policy making regarding HIV/AIDS programs in Thailand

Strong recommendation from this reviewer

Accessibility to readership

A simple EMBASE search for DCE comes up with less than 100, the majority in health economics journals, which might indicate that it is likely that not many others than researchers in health economics and health statisticians, and a handful of health services researchers are familiar with this methodology.

The methods and message of the study will be more accessible to the reader of BMC health services research if it included a short introduction to DCE, (see e.g. Lagarde M, Blaauw D A review of the application and contribution of discrete
choice experiments to inform human resources policy interventions Human Resources for Health 2009 Jul 24; 7:62.) You might also consider moving paragraph 2 from p. 14 about the applicability of this methodology, “Intervention utility can be calculated.........” into this new section.

In addition, the following changes are requested by this reviewer in order to make the present article evaluable.

I. Compulsory changes


2. Choice of methodology/ methods:
The authors state that this is the first study to use this methodology [DCE] in this area and that this study is “experimental”. (Here I think you mean ”exploratory”, see comment 6. Findings below.) This calls for arguments for the authors’ choice of methodology. In addition, it would be useful if you included references.

2.1. Why did you choose this method over other valuation methods e.g. visual analogue scales (VAS), and time trade-off (TTO) for this particular task?

2.2. What is known about feasibility, validity and reliability of DCE and how does it compare to other valuation methods?

3. Participants

3.1 What are the grounds for selecting these particular informant groups?

3.2 In light of the fact that the general public, certainly one the biggest stakeholders in this health scenario, was not represented in either the group discussion to determine criteria for the DCE or the survey for comparing and weighting the criteria , the claim that this study has identified criteria for priority setting (1st sentence, discussion) needs to be restricted.

3.3 On p. 13, the authors state that inclusion of different stakeholder is important. Why did you not have an informant group made up of the general public?

3.4 The “lay people” participants in this study not representative of the general public, they were a particular subclass of “lay” people; they were directly involved in the health care of their communities. ( I dare say that it is likely that most of the PLWHA are also “lay people”. ) This should be reflected in the article text, and a more appropriate label other than “lay people” could be found.

3.5 It is not clear (p. 7, bottom) if the “lay people” were both “health leaders in communities” AND “village health workers”, or if the village health workers are the health leaders in the communities. Please specify.

4. Recruitment
Describe how participants were recruited. It is curious that the PLWHA had a
higher level of education than the “lay people” (table 1), although not surprising by virtue of gender and occupation (60% housewives in “lay people” group) distributions in these groups.

5. Scenarios/ Attribute framing
5.1 You need to account for and discuss the effects of attribute framing on choice in the DCE questions. For example, in the scenario example in table 3, the outcome in Option A is framed negatively while that in Option B is framed positively.

5.2 I request that the 16 scenarios be submitted as supporting/additional files.

6. Findings
It is stated in last paragraph of the background section that this study is intended to explore the usefulness of this methodology:
“.... this study can hence be interpreted as experimental, to test the feasibility of the approach, and evaluate its potential importance.”

First, the use of the term “experimental study” could be misconstrued and lead people to think that you are referring to experimental design, which this obviously is not. The term “pilot” or “exploratory” might be better.

Second, since this study is, according to the authors, “experimental”, they need to present more clear arguments for the validity, reliability and applicability of the study’s findings in the results and discussion.

7. Conclusions: I don’t see where this is substantiated in the paper.
This experimental study ...............has demonstrated the importance of eliciting explicit preferences on the criteria for prioritization of HIV/AIDS interventions in Thailand.

II. Minor essential revisions
This paper would greatly profit from language editing. There are a number of grammatical, semantic and orthographic mistakes. Below are a few:

p. 12, last paragraph
I don’t think you mean this: “First, the findings show that policy makers give priority to preventing HIV interventions, and targeting high risk populations.”

p. 5, paragraph 1.
(ii) “strengthen community’s education” You probably mean “more than one community” in the genitive: communities’

p. 6, last paragraph. I don’t understand your use of parentheses here.
..........., and on the (relative importance of) criteria for priority setting of HIV/AIDS programmes in Thailand.
p. 8, last paragraph.
Hahn and Shapiro 1996 should appear in the text as a number and the citation should be in the reference list.

p. 8 last paragraph
The term is “information overload”, not “overloaded information”.

p. 15
“formulaically” I suggest that you use more accessible terminology.

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

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