Reviewer's report

Title: Adapting developing country epidemiological assessment techniques to improve the quality of health needs assessments in developed countries

Version: 3  Date: 21 February 2005

Reviewer: David Peters

Reviewer's report:

General

This is an improved draft that addressed the questions raised by the reviewers, though other questions have emerged as a result.

It's interesting that the main complaints of communities concern the lack of services -- there actually seems to be a high prevalence of use hospital services (ranging from 25-38% in the last year). Questions of appropriateness of services and expectations for services ought to be addressed. It would be helpful to know how the different stakeholders who participated in the surveys responded to such results.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

We want to see that the survey methodology could be adapted to this setting and still give robust results. Showing table 1 is good, but the table only provides the point estimates without showing the level of error involved -- it would be useful to show the confidence intervals around the point estimates (which incorporate the cluster sampling methods). Better yet, if these confidence intervals were compared to what the confidence intervals would be from simple random sampling (i.e. \((pq/n)^{1/2}\)), we’d see how much precision was lost due to the sampling methods used.

It's also not clear why the sample had to be stratified into 2 groups -- it would be helpful to show what the estimated population distribution of the two strata were, and then what the sampling proportions were. They should then state that the results were weighted if the one strata was oversampled.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

The summary conclusion is a weak. It's not so important that they were able to conduct a survey using cluster survey methodology; rather that they were able to produce robust results that were used by community members, providers, officials and sponsors.

I would drop the reference to adapting the time of day to when people would be home to answer. Everyone makes these adjustments, and it's too trivial to mention.
What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
I have no competing interests.