Author’s response to reviews

Title: Overcoming language barriers in community-based research with refugee and migrant populations: options for using bilingual workers

Authors:

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Author’s response to reviews:

To the Editors,

Thank you for your correspondence dated January 27th and for the opportunity to respond to the reviewers’ comments. We have replied to the specific comments and suggestions of each reviewer separately below. In summary, these include:

# Incorporating more details about sampling, participant demographics and development and piloting of the questionnaire. Some of this information is included in two new tables, Table 2 and Table 3.

# Defining interpreter, translator and bilingual/bicultural worker with regards to the Western Australian context. In Western Australia there is policy around the use of interpreters and translators in health settings and quite strict protocols about what they can and cannot do. This information will help the reader better understand the methodology of the study.

# Including more assessment of the advantages, disadvantages as well as the differences between using interpreters and bilingual/bicultural workers and how these may have impacted on the study results.

Please find below our response to each of the points made by each reviewer.

Reviewer: Gilles Dussault

1. The “Reflections on using bilingual workers” should be based on evidence from the results of the focus groups and the interviews.

The paper has been substantially rewritten to include in each section the advantages, disadvantages as well as the differences between using interpreters and bilingual/bicultural workers and how these may have impacted on the study results.

2. Give number and profile of interviewers by category.

A short paragraph about the number of bilingual workers used during the project has been added on page 10. It reads:

There were 19 bilingual/bicultural workers involved with piloting and
administering the questionnaire. The majority of interviews (82.5%) took place in English or a mixture of English and a community language. Thirty interviews were conducted exclusively in a community language using bilingual/bicultural workers and 10 interviews were conducted using an interpreter.

3. Describe profile of respondents: age, education, country of origin, status in Australia, time since arrival, etc.

As stated in the manuscript on page 7, all women participating in the study had arrived 6 months to 5 years previously. Table 2 shows demographic information about the focus groups participants and Table 3 gives demographic information on the respondents to the questionnaire.

4. Specify language used in interview, and whether it matched interviewer’s mother tongue.

This question has been addressed with the paragraph below that is on pages 16 and 17:

Of surprise was that the majority of the interviews took place in English or a mixture of English and a community language. This is likely to be due to the arrival of a number of English speaking African community members at the time of the research. As the various English dialects spoken by these communities can be difficult to understand by Australian English speakers, interpreters or bilingual workers were essential in order to obtain information from these women. However, it has been noted by other researchers [34-36] that interviews often take place in two or even three languages with participants and interviewers switching between the languages. This may be an influence of acculturation, or that some concepts are more easily articulated in one language over another, or that English is the usual language of communication between the worker and the participant as they are in an English speaking country. The reasons for two or more languages being used in interviews and how that impacts on the quality of information gathered needs to be further explored.

As well as in the following paragraph that appears on page 18:
Interestingly, not all the bilingual/bicultural workers surveyed women exclusively from their own ethnic language community, even though that had been the original expectation of the researchers. The workers had a much broader concept of community, incorporating other migrant women who they interacted with in places such as schools or churches. Given that almost 29 per cent of residents in the Perth metropolitan area have migrated from another country [41], it is to be expected that workers would know women from the wider migrant group, not just those from their own ethnic community. How this impacted on the data collected in the survey is unclear and could be further explored.

5. Indicate number of refusals (if possible by category of interviewers)
This is discussed in the following paragraph that is now on page 18. Other impacts of using bilingual/bicultural workers in a project such as this would benefit from further research. One is gauging the refusal rate. The bilingual/bicultural workers had difficulty assessing how many potential participants refused to participate in the survey. For some potential participants it would socially unacceptable to give a direct refusal to the workers, so not showing up, making a reasonable excuse such as a sick child, or being busy were all reported as reasons for not being able to complete the survey. It was difficult to determine a refusal rate given these circumstances.

6. How many focus groups were conducted, topics covered, profile of participants
We have added Table 2 to describe the focus groups as well as new section in the paper describing the focus groups in more detail on pages 7 and 8.

7. Questionnaires: how was the contents developed, was there any validation
Information on the questionnaire development and validation has been added in a new section on pages 8, 9, &10.

8. Strengths and weaknesses: does that refer to advantages and disadvantages in Table 1? if so, use the same terminology
This has been changed to use the same terminology throughout.

9. Give more information on training sessions: contents, trainers, number of participants, etc.

This information has been added on page 12 in the following paragraph:

All bilingual workers attended a training session which was conducted by the principal researcher. Training covered administration of the survey, issues of confidentiality, asking but not coercing participants, aspects of personal safety when administering the questionnaire, how to respond to participants who became distressed and the criteria for referral to Women’s Health Services for further assistance if required. In addition, each question in the survey was reviewed as to its meaning, and why it was important to ask the question. After the training session, workers were given a small number of surveys, usually five, to complete with women from their own communities, and they were then debriefed to discuss any issues arising during the interview process and to answer outstanding questions. The debriefing process also provided feedback to help better understand the meaning of responses [28]. The bilingual workers were then given the option of completing further surveys with other women from their community.

Reviewer’s report: Reviewer: Allison Squires

1. The manuscript does not adequately incorporate the literature on the subject.

We have expanded the literature review to be more comprehensive and include additional relevant publications including those to which the reviewer directed us. We have also added Table 1 that summarises better practice elements in working with bilingual interviewers.

2. There is a need to argue and support why their choices were better than what is recommended in multiple other studies and publications centered on cross-cultural research.

We have now explained what is meant by interpreter, translator and bilingual/bicultural worker in the Western Australian context. There is both national and state health policy around the use of interpreters and translators in health settings and in Western Australia there are quite strict protocols about what they may and may not do. This information will help the reader better understand the methodology of the study.

3. Frame the paper more as a methods paper that focuses on the pros and cons of each type of interpreter used and implementation lessons learned.

The paper has been substantially rewritten to include in each section the advantages, disadvantages as well as the differences between using interpreters and bilingual/bicultural workers and how these may have impacted on the study results.

We appreciate the reviewers’ comments and we feel that article has been considerably strengthened by the changes made. We thank you for the opportunity to improve the article.

Yours faithfully,