Author’s response to reviews

Title: Slum health: Diseases of neglected populations

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Author’s response to reviews:

Dear Editor:
We thank the two reviewers for their comments. We respond to the comments as follows:

Reviewer 1:
This reviewer had no comments or criticisms. The reviewer recommended acceptance without correction.

Reviewer 2:
This reviewer suggested that the paper should have additional depth and substance by providing detailed profile of health conditions in Salvador and how they differ from that predicted by the health sector. These differences should be analyzed for the causes of discrepancy. In addition, the reviewer suggested that we perform deeper analysis of what the residents report and the developed country indicators, and that these reports should be compared to actual data on morbidity and mortality.

We point out that this paper is written for the "Debate" section of the journal. It was not meant to be a systematic review or an original research paper. Detailed health profile description in Salvador, and the marginalized slum communities in this city, does not exist. Even hospital discharge diagnosis data are not available for most diseases associated with complications of chronic diseases in Salvador and other cities in the developing world. It is impossible to perform analysis of discrepancy if we do not have any data to compare, and it would be meaningless to do any type of discrepancy analysis based on limited or incomplete data. This was the whole point of the debate--we need to find a new way to obtain community or population-based data regarding health conditions in the first place so such discrepancy analysis could be performed to better inform the formal health sector for health planning. This is particularly true in the slums, the main focus of our discussion.

We have data regarding leptospirosis and hypertension based on the surveys we conducted in one section of one favela in Salvador, Brazil. We have "actual data" from such surveys (which are now included in the revision). But, such data do not exist for other sections of the same favela, nor for the whole favela or for the whole city, or for most cities in Brazil. It is not possible to perform the type of analysis this reviewer suggests. Perhaps it was not clear from the discussion that this was the point we wanted to convey. We reworded the discussion and the Abstract to make this point clearer.

The point of this paper was to highlight the current situation in large urban settings like Salvador that health indicator data are not readily available and are not even obtained in most situations. Particularly in slums, the only indicator that there is morbidity is when the residents end up in hospitals or clinics with complications of the chronic disease they have. These types of data are not collected systematically, even in the non-slum community population. This was why we wrote this debate.