Author's response to reviews

Title: Rural health workforce project in five counties in China: research design and baseline description

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Editor,

Many thanks for your email of 23 Jan 2013, regarding the revision and advice of our manuscript (Manuscript ID: 1419655357646227). All of the comments were very fair and constructive, which help us to improve the manuscript significantly.

The detailed modifications are listed below point by point:

1. We have reorganized the discussion and rewritten the conclusion, according to the reviewers’ suggestions.

2. We should acknowledge the debate about the title of this article. As a baseline description of a longitudinal study, the initial title was “Health workforce project in China: research design and baseline description”, which was concrete and suitable for the purpose and contents of this study. Based on the suggestion from one reviewer, we changed the title to “Current situation of village doctors in China”. However, another reviewer suggested us to keep the initial title, and regarded the second title as inappropriate. So we have to make a hard decision about the title. Finally, we decided to keep the initial title but with some modifications, that was “Rural health workforce project in five counties in China: research design and baseline description”. We thank all the constructive suggestions and discussions about the title from three reviewers.

3. Another important issue was about the quality of written English. Based on suggestions from editor and reviewers, we had made large efforts to improve the quality of written English, and the manuscript was edited by native English speaker.
Responses to Reviewers

Reviewer: Yingnan Zhao

Reviewer’s report:

I have read the discussion, it reads a little too tedious now and limitations are not well accepted in the way it is written.

Based on the suggestion, we had reorganized the discussion and limitations, to make it concise and concrete for reading and understanding.

Reviewer: Victoria Fan

Reviewer’s report:

Overall, this is a major improvement from the first submission -- with considerably more context and much better presentation of methods. The results are fairly dry, which is not surprisingly given that the study is only a baseline study.

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?

Yes.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?

Yes.

3. Are the data sound and well controlled?

Yes.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

Thanks for your fair advices; we corrected some errors, such as “P” to “p” in the reporting statistical value et al. We tried our best to make the report be more concrete and scientific.
5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

Yes

6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?

We appreciated your suggestion, and we added “five counties” into the title based on your idea (not four counties, because we had five sampling counties, while two counties were combined in the analysis. So it really looks like 4 counties.). However the title had been changed to “Rural health workforce project in five counties in China: research design and baseline description”, and detailed reason for the change have been showed above.

7. Is the writing acceptable?

It was really beneficial for us to follow this advice, so we revised whole manuscript and correct some errors.

Minor essential revisions

In the title, please insert “in four counties” after “village doctors” and before “in China”.

Thanks, we had changed that as you suggested.

In abstract, delete “(including developed, developing, and underdeveloped counties) in China”.

We realized that this was not appropriate, and deleted that.

In the clause “which leads the official statistics have no comprehensive information about village doctor that may be why village doctors were excluded by the recently studied on China's health workforce”, insert the word “to” after “statistics” and before “have”; change “village doctor that may be” to “village doctors, and that may be”

Thanks so much to point out this problem and we changed that following your suggestions.

In the sentence “they have an indispensable impact on China’s healthcare system and the health of
rural residents”, insert “are likely to” after “they” and before “have an”

This was more suitable for this statement. Thanks.

In the sentence “China has its own organization-based annual survey, but it primarily focuses on townships and above, and most of the questionnaire was objective. A rather large shortcoming of the annual survey is the lack of individual data regarding rural healthcare workers.” The authors should cite this. Without citing, I currently do not believe this statement.

This was really important for the validity of this sentence, and we have added two references into this sentence: one was “2012 China Health Statistics Yearbook”; another was “China’s human resources for health: quantity, quality, and distribution” by Anand S, Fan VY et al, Lancet 2008.

In the sentence “If the questions were incomplete or missed, a telephone interview was supplemented”, delete the word “was” and insert the word “the main mode of interviewing”

Thanks, and we had accomplished that.

The authors should note how often telephone interviews were conducted.

Detailed frequency (78 times) of telephone interviews was added into the manuscript, thanks for your suggestion.

Table 2. It is very unclear how there can be 95% confidence intervals since the denominator N is the census of all village doctors in the county! The authors should delete the 95% CI in Table 2.

It was a fair suggestion, and we had changed Table 2 based on your advice.

Table 4 needs a better title.

We appreciated your constructive suggestion, and we changed the title of Table 4 to “Practicing methods of village doctors”, which might be better.

The paper needs a thorough copy-editing.
This was a fair advice, and we had conducted a thorough copy-editing, that was really important for the improvement of this paper.

**Reviewer: Vivian Lin**

**Major compulsory revisions**

Compulsory revision:

While the authors amended the title in line with feedback from one of the reviewers, the title is quite inappropriate for the content of the article. The paper describes the methodology and baseline for a new longitudinal study. It does not describe current situation of village doctors in China, in either a sufficiently comprehensive nor representative fashion. The title needs to be changed.

Thanks so much for this constructive and meaningful suggestion, we had finally changed the title to “Rural health workforce project in five counties in China: research design and baseline description”. This title was what we wanted to do at first, and we also believed it was more appropriate for the purpose and content of the article. In addition, we added “five counties” into the title, which showed the districts of study.

The rationale for choosing the counties and the procedures for selecting these counties have not been described. They are only described as being geographically and socioeconomically different, reflecting the common categories used in China. Was it a convenice sample based on who the authors knew? where else might have been considered? are there historical elements of health system development in these counties that should be noted?

In the methods, we supplemented more information about selecting these counties. It was a convince sample actually, based on the former cooperation between China Institute of Health and local governments. There were no historical elements that should be noted in the text. Additionally,
Hailun County from Heilongjiang Province had been added into this project, and the data had already been collected in Sep 2012.

The conclusion is a very broad. The baseline findings should be briefly summarized, and the implications for policy and reform should be flagged. How data collection and analysis will be undertaken in the future would also be usefully described, so that the readers know how to follow this piece of work.

Thanks for your fair advice; we rewrite the conclusion based on your suggestion to make it more concrete and specific. We also acknowledge what we will do in the next, which is important for a longitudinal study. Our team members have been conducting further data analyses, and the second wave survey might be done in about two years.

We would appreciate your consideration of this improved manuscript for publication in the Human Resources for Health. We thank you for your time and look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

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