Reviewer's report

Title: Identifying common impairments in frail and dependent older people: Validation of the COPE assessment for non-specialised health workers in low resource primary health care settings

Version: 2 Date: 30 May 2015

Reviewer: Rhian Simpson

Reviewer's report:

Question well defined.
The question was not particularly well defined and I had to read the paper several times for clarification. It would be clearer if the focus is on the COPE tool itself rather than the process around the tool. For example in section 119 to 121 it says aim is to develop tool but then says feasibility and acceptability of this approach.

Methods
Sample: selection bias as CHW were asked to choose those that they knew from their practice who were already frail. It does not say how many the 159 were chosen from or why this number was chosen. If you were to use the tool in a more general population would it be as good at measuring impairments? This limitation is not really addressed in the paper.

353 44% of the sample had 5 or more impairments suggesting that the sample was very frail.

There is no detail re how the participants were approached or consented.
The COPE tool and how it was designed is well described and evidenced. Maybe starting with this in the METHODS section would be clearer with details following re how the tool was to be tested in practice.

Training of CHW was well described, but there was no discussion around the reliability of the COPE as a test including inter rater reliability.

The biggest problem with the study for me is the clinician assessment using EASY Care that was used to validate the COPE. It is acknowledged that this is not a gold standard (123) and in the discussion (458). 124 it states that Drs were not specialist, lacked time for a rigorous assessment. There is nothing describing how these clinicians were chosen, trained and supported re using the tool or its reliability.

Discussion/Conclusions

446 I think the first objective should be that the COPE assessment tool is a valid tool as per title.
There was only moderate agreement between the COPE and clinician judgment and this is discussed. It is recognised that without a gold standard it is difficult to interpret the findings. This is the main difficulty I feel when drawing conclusions from the study.

There are no other external data sources either that could be used.

With any assessment tool the acceptability to the individual being assessed is important and should also maybe be considered for future work.

Title/Abstract

Might be clearer: “Validation of the COPE assessment Tool for identifying common impairments….

The conclusion should centre around the validity of the COPE tool.

For me the limitations of the study and the uncertainty re the validity of the COPE tool need to be better described if it is to be published. Future work should be addressing some of these limitations e.g. can it be used in a more general population, how to improve the EASY CARE assessment so that there is a greater confidence that it is a true measure of common impairments.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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.