Author’s response to reviews

Title: Exposure rate of VZV among women attending antenatal care clinic in Sri Lanka - a cross sectional study

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Response to the Reviewer and the Editor-in-chief

Thanks for submitting you manuscript to BMC infectious disease. The two experts in the field have given their comments. Please respond point-by-point to their comments and also identify by highlighting the exact location in the manuscript where you have made the change.

Response to the Editor-in-chief

We thank the Reviewers and the Editor-in-chief for the comments and the criticism and these have improved the manuscript in a big way. We have gone through the comments of the reviewers as pointed out by the Editor and comprehensively revised the manuscript. Also the changes are highlighted in yellow in the manuscript to make the distinction between the changes and shifting of texts we had to do to build the paper in a more organized form.

Response to the reviewers

Reviewer 1 - Holly Seale, PhD, MPH, BSc
Abstract

Comment 1: The use of the term 'estate populations' will not mean anything to people from outside Sri Lanka and so I suggest that the authors consider an alternative description.

Response: 'Estate populations' – These are populations live in tea plantations and the ancestors of them were brought to Sri Lanka to work in the tea plantations during the British colonial period. These populations mainly involve in tea plantation work including plucking tea for living and at present some members of the population have moved onto do other occupations to improve their socio-economical conditions.

Background

Comment 2: The information contained in the first paragraph has been previously reported numerous times before. Can I please suggest that you start with the info on the epidemiology of the varicella and then cover any previous published sero-papers.

Response: This point has been taken into consiration and general information on varicella has been removed and information on the epidemiology was added to the first paragraph.

Comment 3: Can you include some relevant references for the following line: 'Various studies showing differences in exposure rates to VZV in different age groups have been noted with different hypotheses.'

Response: Relevant references were included to support this sentence.

Comment 4: Can you include some relevant references for the following line? 'The climatic factors like humidity, socio-economic conditions and cultural practices appear to play a role for the differences in the exposure to the virus in the tropics.'

Response: Relevant references were included to support this sentence.

Comment 5: Can you please comment on whether the vaccine is available publicly or privately in Sri Lanka and also about uptake amongst kids?
Response: Information on availability of the vaccine in Sri Lanka and it’s uptake among the population has been included.

Methods

Comment 6: Further information about the methods used needs to be included. For example, can you please elaborate on who the population sampled was, was there any restrictions placed on participation i.e. did you exclude anyone? did you know the immunization status?, did you calculate a sample size for the study? What was the minimum level of detection and what did you do with equivocal results?

Response: Many thanks for this comment and the answers to the reviewer’s questions are given in the methods section of the manuscript and the changes are highlighted.

Comment 7: Further information about the statistical analysis needs to be included.

Response: Further information on the statistical analysis is included to the methods section and the changes are highlighted.

Results

Comment 8: Need to be consistent with the use of decimal points.

Response: The above points have been checked and changed based on the comment of the reviewer.

Comment 9: Provide a brief description of the women that were included in the sample.

Response: We have given a brief description of the women that were included in the sample and the changes are highlighted. These women were from socially and religiously diverse backgrounds from middle class families and from the estate sector.

Comment 10: Can you be consistent with the terminology used? - I would stick with varicella disease.

Response: The above points have been checked and changed according to the comment of the reviewer.
Comment 11: Figures 1, 2 and 3 do not add any value to the paper and I would suggest removing them and sticking to describing the results in text.

Response: We agree with the comments and Figures 1, 2 and 3 are removed.

Discussion

Comment 12: Please provide a statement outlining the limitations associated with this study.

Response: The limitations of the study was included to the discussion section and the changes are highlighted.

Reviewer 2 - Mohammed Abdelgadir Abdelmahmoud, MSc

Suggested changes to the manuscript title is needed to

1- Exposure rate of VZV among women attending antenatal care clinic in Sri Lanka - a cross sectional study.

Or

2- Sero-prevalence of VZV among women attending antenatal care clinic at Teaching Hospital, Peradeniya, Sri Lanka.

Response: The title of the research article was changed as suggested by the reviewer to “Exposure rate of VZV among women attending an antenatal care clinic in Sri Lanka - a cross sectional study”

About the material and methods part

Comment 1: State study design clearly in material and methods section, eg;

This cross-sectional study was conducted from December 2015 to February 2016, etc..

Response: Further information of the study design has been included and the changes are highlighted.
Comment 2: How do you choose study participants? eg, randomly and how do you control them? eg: We control them according to their age, Would you give the eligibility criteria.

Response: Thanks for the comment and the eligibility criteria of the study was included to the materials and methods section the changes are highlighted.

Comment 3: From line 102 to line 112, about material and methods part, there were many (The), would you kindly please, used past simple, eg; samples were collected, blood samples were kept, all serum samples were tested, etc.

Response: The above points have been checked and the sentences have been changed according to comment of the reviewer.

Comment 4: About Ethical consideration, include the Reference ethical approval letter number to your Manuscript. ???

Line 117, delete, (This is cross sectional study conducted), from Ethical consideration.

Response: The Ethics number has been indicated in the Methods sections and the changes are highlighted. Also the sentence in Line 117 has been deleted based on the comment.

About Discussion part

Comment 5: The discussion part is suggested, but it was too long, would you kindly please, summarize it to 3-4 key points including your problem.

From line 138 to line 160, no need.

Response: The text from lines 138-160 has been removed as suggested by the reviewer. The Discussion part has been trimmed as suggested and each paragraph has a key point.

Comment 6: Would you kindly please, add some references of recent relevant studies eg; (2014, 2015, 2016) for better recognition of your work.

Response: The available references have been added as suggested by the reviewer.