Author’s response to reviews

Title: Trends in Cause and Place of Death for Children in Portugal (a European Country with no Paediatric Palliative Care) during 1987-2011: a population-based study

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Author’s response to reviews:

To the Editor of BMC Pediatrics

Re: manuscript BPED-D-16-00502

Sir,

Again, we would like to thank you and the reviewers for the careful evaluation of our manuscript. As previously, we have discussed the comments and suggestions made.

Please see below our responses and actions taken to address the points made by Reviewer 2. Please let us know if you have any further queries.

We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Kind regards,

Ana Lacerda & Barbara Gomes
Óscar Zurriaga (Reviewer 1): no further comments made; thank you for reviewing again.

Anjali Shah (Reviewer 2):

Abstract

1. Lines 52-3. I would recommend rephrasing the sentence to read: Age, diagnosis, season and region are associated with home death, and should be considered when planning services to support families choosing this option.
   a. Agreed and changed.

Materials and methods

2. Line 110. I would strongly urge the authors to add a sentence explaining why multiple imputation was not appropriate for use in this analysis.
   a. Agreed and added:

   “Three variables with high levels of missing data were excluded (urbanisation level, mothers’ working status, and father’s educational level); multiple imputation was deemed inappropriate as it would lead to an unacceptable level of assumptions (missing data in 31.4 – 66.7% of cases).”

Results

3. Line 144: please add the word 'gradually' to read: 'Over the study period age at death gradually increased:…'
   a. Agreed and changed.

4. Generally in the results, changes and trends are described, but there is little reference to statistical significance of such changes. Perhaps some P values or confidence intervals and the words 'significant / non-significant change' could be added?
a. We added these, when deemed appropriate (especially when only shown in additional files) and when it would not result in a much longer wording (since P and CI can be accessed in the tables and figure legends).

Discussion

5. Lines 221-224. I am still struggling to understand what is 'first-time' about this study. By this I refer to two publications, which I would recommend the authors use in the manuscript.

a. Thanks for flagging these two publications, which we have now added to the manuscript. Please note that neither address the first year of age and that the first does not examine place of death. As part of the preparation for this study, we have conducted a systematic literature review of studies on place of death for children and adolescents, but missed the report by Hardelid et al because we focused on research published in scientific journals. We did find (and included as reference 28, currently reference 29) a paper by Hardelid et al which focused on cause of death of children dying in hospital. Many thanks for sharing that report, which shows a differing trend for place of death in the UK. We have changed the referred sentence to:

“In this trend analysis of paediatric mortality data by cause and place of death in a European country without paediatric palliative care, we found that although deaths from children and adolescents have become rare, those caused by CCCs (potentially having PPC needs) are of increasing importance.”