Author’s response to reviews

Title: The health conditions of inmates in Italy

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Author’s response to reviews:

Point-by-point response to the reviewers’ comments

We thank the Reviewers and the Editor for their time and efforts in considering our manuscript for publication in BMC Public Health. The manuscript has been amended according to the reviewers’ requests.

The changes made in the text are underlined.
Reviewer #1: A worthy and timely piece.

An easily-digestible descriptive study.

Impressive subject no. with engaging yet accessible statistical results.

I wonder if the addition of 'and health' between 'living' and 'conditions' in the final sentence of the abstract might be beneficial.

- As suggested, we have added “and health” in the final sentence of the abstract.

I wonder if the authors are interested in extending the remit of the paper a little, to include additional analysis, as it is quite descriptive only at present.

I wonder if evidence / services / suggestions in the fields of dual diagnosis, joint services, silo working, joint pathways, marrying general, public, and mental health services, etc. might be an improvement for the paper overall, as the findings demonstrate sig. multiple illness experience in tandem.

- This is an interesting suggestion, but the data available (this is a cross-sectional study on health status in prisons using the 9th revision of the Clinical Modification of the International Classification of Diseases - ICD-9-CM) does not allow for an analysis of the diagnostic services, including mental health.

The data are from 2014, according to the abstract, which might perhaps need double-checking with the editorial team for the journal.

- We specify that the survey was conducted from February 4th, 2014, until June 4th, 2014, and involved every inmate who was counted in a census taken at midnight on February 3th, 2014, in every prison involved in the study. The statistical analyses were conducted in 2015.

Occasional strong assertions which arguably require supporting refs (e.g. line 41 p. 3 re. prison settings and contracting diseases; line 12 p. 4 re. nutrition, violence, hygiene, etc.).

- We have added the references.
Occasional colloquialisms in the prose which are not to my own taste, but obviously acceptable if authors desire their inclusion (e.g. link 44 p. 3 re. 'get in touch').

- We have corrected this, and the entire manuscript was revised by native English-speaking editors.

Illegal drug use in prison was not recorded due to its prohibition. However, evidence suggests this does occur in prisons. Thus, a critical reflection re. study design, ethics, and prison security responsibilities might be interesting.

- As suggested, we have added a critical reflection on this point.

Clinicians undertook the study at the frontline. These social actors, arguably, occupy positions of power in the environment. Thus, I wonder how feasible the non-participation option was for the incarcerated. Perhaps a one sentence ethical reflection here would improve the article.

- We have stressed this in the discussion.

Occasionally the word smoke is used in the paper and I wonder if the word smoking would be more fitting in terms of English language usage (e.g. p. 6 line approx. 32).

- We have changed “smoke” to “smoking”.

Page 7 lines 5-11: commas where full stops should be in the way percentages are written?

- We have corrected this.

There is inconsistency re. Type 2 and Type II diabetes nomenclature in the paper.

- We have corrected this.

Page 10 line 3: incorrect % next to no. of cigarettes per day?

- We have corrected this.
Where England is written on p. 10 perhaps England and Wales would be more fitting re. HMPS as a system.

- As suggested, we have corrected this.

Formatting error p. 11 line 27 re. a left in track change underline?

- We have eliminated the underline.

Page 12 line 12 re. Acknowledgements: 'funding it' not 'finding it'?

- We have corrected this.

Although not the overall or original remit of the paper I do wonder if the authors could extrapolate any findings / conclusions which might have implications / transferability to different countries / penal contexts.

- As suggested, we have added some findings that have implications/transferability to different countries/penal contexts.

Reviewer #2:

ABSTRACT

There are a number of issues with phrasing in this section. I have highlighted a couple, but there are more. Just check through once more to ensure clarity of expression.

p3 ln4 >>> Should read, "The aim of this study…"

- We have corrected this.

p3 ln7 >>> The sentence, "describe the features of the population in Italian prisons and their health, focusing on internal diseases," does not really make sense. It is the health of the inmates you are interested in, not the health of the prison. Just be careful with phrasing.

- We have corrected this.
p3 ln14 >>> Why present percentage of males here?
- We have deleted the percentage of males.

BACKGROUND

As a general point, and as with the previous section, there are grammatical issues to address in order to ensure clarity of expression.
- The manuscript has been edited by a native English-speaking editor.

p4 ln4 >>> You mention prisoners are "mostly as pretrial detainees/remand prisoners or as sentenced prisoners." What other types are there?
- We have eliminated “mostly as”.

p4 ln51 >>> This paragraph could be written with a little more clarity. What exactly are you saying here?
- As suggested, we have rewritten this paragraph.

p5 ln9 >>> Should that be a lack of "microclimate and light"?
- We have changed "microclimate and light" with “lack of light and fresh air” as in the ref. 3.

p5 ln17 >>> Again, there are sections here that are a little difficult to follow. Needs some rewording.
- As suggested, we have rewritten this paragraph.

p5 ln46 >>> Should that be CDC? If not, use Italian with acronym with English translation in brackets. Do the same for other similar instances in the document.
- We have eliminated this abbreviation because it is not repeated in the manuscript.
There needed to be a bigger section on what you actually planned to do. What were your research questions/hypotheses? What were your predictions? Just a little elaboration needed really.

- As suggested, we have included this section.

METHODS

p6 ln22 >>> Rather than, "internal and psychiatric," it might be clearer to state, "general medical health and mental health/psychiatric."

- As suggested, we have corrected this.

RESULTS

p7 ln42 >>> You do not need to repeat the percentage of males.

- We have corrected this.

p7 ln47 >>> Replace "foreigners" with something like “from other EU/non-EU countries.”

- As suggested, we have replaced "foreigners" with "from other EU/non-EU countries."

p7 ln55 >>> It is conventional to refer to participants rather than subjects in some disciplines. Not sure if that is the case here.

- As suggested, we have changed “subjects” to “participants”.

p7 ln59 >>> Not clear why total number of diagnoses is reported. What does that add?
- We have eliminated the total number of diagnoses, and we have reported the average of the disease per detainee.

p8 ln5 >>> You have changed from using full-stops to commas to designate the decimal point in percentages.
- We have changed these.

DISCUSSION
The opening paragraph needs to be a lot clearer and specific. What exactly are the implications and how issues likely to be addressed?
- According with the reviewer’s comments, we reorganized the discussion section.

As it stands, this section reads rather like a list. There needs to be more overt structure here that leads the reader through your findings within the appropriate context.
- As suggested, we have modified the discussion section.

CONCLUSION
Why start with limitations? Would this not be better suited in the Discussion?
- We have moved the potential limitations of the study to the discussion.

There needs to be more here. This should be punchier. You need to really spell out the implications and what the next step might be.
- According to the reviewer’s comments, we have spelled out the implications and the next step.

GENERAL
Although I have made specific comments in some sections about grammar and general clarity, there are instances throughout the document. It is, therefore, worthwhile just reading through
purely to tease out any instances where grammatical issues need to be addressed or additional context needs to be added to ensure the reader follows your argument.

- The manuscript has been edited by a native English-speaking editor.