Author’s response to reviews

Title: Nursing home staff’s perspective on end-of-life care of German nursing home residents: A cross-sectional survey

Authors:
Anke Strautmann (anke.strautmann@uol.de)
Katharina Allers (katharina.allers@uol.de)
Alexander Fassmer (alexander.fassmer@uol.de)
Falk Hoffmann (falk.hoffmann@uol.de)

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Author’s response to reviews:

Dear editor,

Thank you for the valuable comments of the reviewers and for the opportunity to revise our manuscript.

Please find attached our answers to the reviewers’ comments point-by-point. In the manuscript, all changes are highlighted in yellow.

With kind regards,

Anke Strautmann (on behalf of the authors)

Reviewers’ feedback and authors’ comments:

Reviewer 1: Frank Brennan
1. Abstract. In the section "Background" in the 2nd last and last sentences you use the expression "status quo". A better expression might be "the current situation".

- changed

2. Abstract. Under the heading "Results" first sentence you say that 64.4 % rated end of life care as "rather good". There were 2 choices given to the respondents rather good and rather bad. So truthfully you should say "64.4 % of the respondents rated end-of-life care rather good and the remainder rated it as rather bad."

- changed

3. Abstract. Under "Results" second line you state "death was estimated at" you could state "was estimated by the respondents at...' 

- changed

4. Abstract., under heading "Results" 4th line rather than "holding" replace with "held".

- changed

5. Page 3, line 18. Rather than "be quite present" could simply state "be present".

- changed

6. Page 8. Under the heading "Advance directives..." in the first line you state : "Respondents approximated that 49.5%..." This could be better expressed as "The respondents stated that, in their estimation, approximately 49.5% (SD: 21.6) of the residents had an AD."

- changed

7. Page 8 last paragraph you discuss the SAPV. Is it possible to describe what this is - what does this program do ?

- The SAPV is now explained in the "The questionnaire" (Methods) section.

8. Page 14. Line 4. Rather than "the highest amounts" should be "the highest amount..."

- changed

9. Finally, you could state that a further study would look at the actual rather than the perceived events. This study examines the perceptions of the respondents.

- This information was included in the “Strengths and limitations” section.
10. Also it would be good for the authors to make reference to good models of Palliative Care in Nursing Homes that exist already around the world. If there are very few, you could say "There are very few examples in the literature of models of Palliative care in Nursing Homes."

- Thank you for this hint. We now included this point in more detail in the discussion.

Reviewer 2: Anna E Bone

Title and Abstract

11. Detailing this as a 'cross sectional study', does not convey the study design - please could the authors consider adding 'postal survey' or 'survey' to provide a more complete description.

- We changed the title accordingly.

12. The abstract would benefit from the addition of some key information: which care home staff were invited to take part?
what were the roles of those who responded?
Measures of variability for the results, e.g. standard deviation, range, or interquartile range.

- The abstract now contains more detailed information on the staff asked for participation and the respondents. Additionally, the standard deviations were added where available.

Background

13. This section would benefit from inclusion of contextual details for an international audience relating to care homes in Germany. What are the different models of nursing homes, e.g. level of nursing provision, how are they funded?

- Thank you for raising this point. We now included further information on funding and ownership in the background section. For more comprehensive details on the German Health care system and on the long-term care system we now refer to the newly included reference 7.

14. The language used in the first two sentences of the third paragraph page 3 require revision. 'Looking for high quality care is unusual phrasing, and then 'this type of care' is non-specific and confusing. Please revise.

- The wording of these sentences was revised.

Methods
15. Detail about how many surveys sent to each care home would be useful. I expect this is one per home but this could be made explicit.

- The manuscript was changed according to the reviewer’s suggestion.

16. Sentence on page 5, second paragraph - 'All questionnaires were recorded by one researcher...' What is the meaning of 'recorded'? Data entered into a database? This is ambiguous and should be clarified.

- The wording of this sentence was revised in order to clarify this point.

17. It is stated that the questionnaire was based on the HOMERN study and was 'similar'. It would be helpful to detail how the questionnaire was developed, does it use any validated measures, and how was this amended for the purposes of this study.

- Information on the development of the questionnaire was now added to the manuscript. We did not use specific and comprehensive instruments to assess constructs but aimed at assessing perceptions and estimations on relevant outcomes of nursing home staff. Hence, no specific validated instruments were used.

18. Please include a justification for why the questionnaire sought estimates of numbers rather than actual figures from the care home records.

- Thank you for raising this point. In nursing homes actual figures of the items we asked for are not routinely being collected. Therefore, collecting the actual figures rather than the estimations would only be possible in a prospective study design, and not in a cross-sectional study as we did. We now discussed this in more detail in the section on strengths and limitations.

19. Authors state that the questionnaire was subdivided into three different parts but then it is not clear what those parts are. Please address this.

- Thank you. As this obviously was not described clearly enough, the explanation for the topics of the different parts of the questionnaire was revised.

Discussion

20. I suggest there is greater acknowledgment of the limitations of this study. Particularly the potential for bias due the questions and the roles of the respondents.

- We revised the section on strengths and limitations of the manuscript accordingly.