Author’s response to reviews

Title: Physiotherapists’ and midwives' views of increased inter recti abdominis distance and its management in women after childbirth

Authors:

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Author’s response to reviews:

Cover letter with point-by-point responses to reviewers comments on the revised submission with Manuscripts number: BMWH-D-19-00651R1

Dear Editor BMC Women’s Health,

We are happy for the positive response to the revised version of our manuscript. We have made revisions of the manuscript according to the reviewers’ comments. Please find below our point-by-point responses to the reviewers’ comments. We provide a detailed response to each reviewer/editorial point raised, describing what amendments have been made to the manuscript text and where in the manuscript these can be found. All new or revised text is highlighted in blue in the manuscript. Both authors have participated in the revisions and have approved to the revised manuscript.

Best regards,

Catharina Gustavsson corresponding author on behalf of both authors
PhD Associate professor and clinical researcher in primary healthcare

Reviewer reports:

Abdullah Al Ibrahim, Doctor of Medicine (Reviewer 1):

Reviewer’s comment: Thank you, It was an excellent and comprehensive feedback to the reviewer's comments

Authors’ response: Thank you for the positive response to our revised manuscript.
Philip Teg-Nefaah Tabong (Reviewer 2): Physiotherapists' and midwives' views of increased inter recti abdominis distance and its management in women after childbirth

Reviewer’s comment: Thanks for submitting a revised version of the manuscript. I still maintain that the manuscript has merits and the area of research is interesting. However, some editing may be required to improve flow.

Authors’ response: Thank you for the positive response to our revised manuscript. We have thoughtfully addressed all of your comments point-by-point.

Reviewer’s comment: Abstract

The authors have sufficiently addressed my concern here.

Reviewer’s comment: Background

The additions are essential in contextualizing their study.

On page 4 lines 29 to 34: The statements should revised. The statements do not read well. There is also a typo there "DRA" should be changed to "IRD"

Authors’ response: Thank you for alerting us on the use of wrong abbreviation. We have changed it to the correct abbreviation, i.e. “IRD”. We have also elaborated the content and the phrasing of the sentences at page 4 (second paragraph, lines 12-20), in order to be more precise in our statements and to improve interpretability of the text. The changes has been highlighted in blue in the manuscript (page 4, line 29-ff). The revised sentences (with new wording underlined) is: “Early studies have reported that increased IRD affects between 30-70% of pregnant women [5], and that the increased IRD may persist in the early postpartum period in about 35-60% of women [6]. A more recent study reported that the prevalence of increased IRD was 100% in late pregnancy and decreased to 39% at 6 months postpartum [7]. Another study found a prevalence of increased IRD of 60% at 6-weeks postpartum, 45% at 6 months postpartum, and 33% at 12 months postpartum [8]. Increased IRD has also been found in 39% of older parous women [9], and in 52% of women in a menopausal patient population [10], which indicate that IRD may persist past childbearing years.”

Reviewer’s comment: On same page 4: lines 58-60: What does the sentence "A recent review found a few studies of weak quality indicating that IRD width may be associated with health-related quality of life, abdominal…." What does the "few studies with weak quality” mean?

Authors’ response: We have revised the sentence (which in this revised version is located at page 5, line 7-9). It is now worded: “A recent review describes an association between IRD width and
health-related quality of life, abdominal muscle strength and severity of low back pain [17], but
the level of evidence is low.”

Reviewer’s comment: Study design

Language correction is needed.

Authors’ response: The manuscript has undergone English language editing by a native English
speaker, who did not find any English language errors in the text in subheading “Study design”.

Reviewer’s comment: Participants

My concerns have been sufficiently addressed in this section.

Reviewer’s comment: Procedure for data collection

My concerns have been sufficiently addressed

Reviewer’s comment: Data analysis

The authors should indicate how the coding was done—did they employ any computer-assisted
tool such as NVivo, Atlas.ti etc.

Authors’ response: The coding and grouping into categories was done in Microsoft Word and
Excel. No other computerised software program, such as NVivo, MaxQDA or similar, was used.
To clarify this we have added a sentence to the text in the subheading “Data analysis” (page 8,
line 17-19). The new sentence is worded: “The analysis was done computerised by coding of the
text in Word text files and by grouping into subcategories and categories in Excel files
(Microsoft Office 2016).”

Reviewer’s comment: Results

My concerns have been addressed

Reviewer’s comment: Discussion

I am of the opinion that certain phrases need to be revised to maintain a balance in the
discussion. Statement such as "deficiencies in the management' Lacked knowledge” are
problematic. The authors did not assess the knowledge of the participants. The participants only
expressed the opinion about IRD in the thematic areas explored. But statement such as "most of
the participants lacked knowledge or deficient in” creates the impression that a tool was used to assess participants knowledge and a cutoff determined to put participants into various levels of knowledge. Even the use of word such "most" should be avoided since these are group interviews.

Authors’ response: We have revised the text throughout the discussion section (page 15, line 1-ff), to clarify that in our statements in the text, we refer to the participants’ perceptions and what they expressed. The revised text and exchanged words are highlighted in blue in the manuscript.

This means that we have revised the second sentence in the discussion section (page 15, line 4-6) to the new wording (with new text underlined here and highlighted in blue in the manuscript): “The findings revealed that the health professionals perceive that they have insufficient knowledge about increased IRD, which they believe is problematic since it leads to inadequate management of increased IRD after childbirth.”

Further, that the fourth sentence in the discussion section (page 15, lines 8-15) is now phrased: “In summary, the results show that, due to sparse and somewhat contradictory research findings and the absence of clinical guidelines, these health professionals perceived that they lacked basic preconditions for applying an evidence-based practice concerning increased IRD. The health professionals expressed that they obtained their information about increased IRD from the media and fitness coaches, and hence were somewhat unsure about what to believe regarding the phenomenon and how to handle/manage women with increased IRD in their clinical practice.”

We have also, at several places in the text in the discussion section (pages 15-17), clarified statements which are referring to the participants views and what they communicated by including the wordings: “the health professionals”, “the participants”, “they”.

In addition, in the discussion section (pages 15-17) we have also clarified the vocabulary referring to numbers of participants, i.e. the word “most”, by changing expression and clarifying circumstances. In specific, in the second paragraph in the discussion section (page 15, lines 23-25), we have revised the sentence that was previously starting with the word “most”. The new wording is: “All but one of the participants in the focus groups expressed that they were unsure about and perceived that they lacked knowledge regarding the phenomenon of increased IRD and its management in women after childbirth.”

Reviewer’s comment: Strength and limitation

Language correction is required. For example "The focus group form was chosen for data collection……" What does "the focus group form" mean?

Authors’ response: We appreciate to be made aware of that two letters were lost in the word “format”. The intended word is “format”, not “form”. That is, the intended wording was: “The focus group format was chosen….”
However, in order to clarify what we mean to express, we have revised the phrasing in the sentence in the sub-heading “Strengths and limitations” (page 17, line 12-14). The phrasing is now: “Data was collected through focus groups instead of individual interviews since focus groups were deemed more suitable to promote interaction and information exchange between participants.”

Reviewer’s comment: Conclusion

Acceptable

Editorial comment: If improvements to the English language within your manuscript have been requested, you should have your manuscript reviewed by someone who is fluent in English.

Authors’ response: The manuscript has undergone English language editing by a native English speaker, whom is also well familiar with scientific English and qualitative research methods.