Author’s response to reviews

Title: Prevalence, and health- and sociodemographic associations for visits to traditional and complementary medical providers in the seventh survey of the Tromsø Study

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Author’s response to reviews:

Dear editor

Thank you for the opportunity to edit the manuscript once more to fully meet the reviewers requests. The main concern from reviewer Carolina Ung is the justification for, and the implication of the study. Papers describing the prevalence and association for use of traditional and complementary medicine (T&CM) is quite commonly published, and our study add to the sparse Nordic literature on the topic, describing use of T&CM in an area where also the only indigenous population in Europe live, namely the Sami people. The reason conventional health care providers need to know who the users of these modalities are is their obligation to provide patient-centred culturally sensitive health care (PC-CSHC), in particular to patients with minority background. We have now emphasised this all throughout the manuscript to a greater degree than in the first and second version of the paper. We have also changed the terminology from Users of traditional healing (TH) and Users of other CAM modalities to users of Traditional and complementary medicine (T&CM) to clearer show how this paper add to the literature of prevalence and associations for use of T&CM.

Below you will find a point-by-point response with a detailed response to each reviewer.

We hope the paper will be acceptable for publication in BMC complementary and alternative medicine as it now stands.
Best regards,

Agnete E. Kristoffersen

Reviewer reports:

Carolina Ung, PhD (Reviewer 2):

I appreciate the opportunity to review your manuscript again.

1. However, the justification and significance of the study remain uncertain. Why is it important to investigate the differences in the characteristics between users of TH and users of other CAM modalities in northern Norway? What prompted the need for such study?

We have now strengthen the justification of the study, namely conventional health care providers' obligation to provide patient-centred culturally sensitive health care (PC-CSHC). We have also reduced the focus on the differences in the characteristics between the users of traditional medicine and the users of complementary medicine and use now the terminology traditional and complementary medicine (T&CM). We have further strengthens the argumentation of why we need such a study for conventional health care providers to be able to provide PC-CSHC to patients who use parallel health care systems.

2. The findings of this study does not fully support: "As the municipality of Tromsø also have a Sami population and the TH is influenced by Sami folk medicine, the findings in this study might be valid also for other areas in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia with a Sami population."

We have now changed this to:

"As Sami people more often than other groups add TM to their health care [9], knowledge from this study might be useful for conventional health care providers in other areas in Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia with a Sami population." (line 385-387)

3. The statement is unclear: "These differences found shows that collapsing the associations for TH use and for other CAM approaches not traditionally practiced in the current country into one entity, as suggested by the WHO (Traditional and complementary medicine (T&CM), can undermine the true associations for TH and other CAM modalities."

We have now deleted this statement from the manuscript.
4. The findings of this study do not fully support: "To be able to offer patient-centred health care, conventional health care providers should ask patients about their use of TH and other CAM modalities separately."

We have now strengthened the argumentation for this substantially all through the manuscript.

5. The rationale for the study method to address the objective of this study, the inclusion and exclusion criteria of participants, and "total birth cohorts" and "representative population samples" in the statement remain unclear: "The Tromsø Study is an ongoing longitudinal population-based cohort study among adult inhabitants in the municipality of Tromsø in northern Norway. Seven surveys have been conducted between 1974 and 2016 where total birth cohorts as well as representative population samples have been invited to participate with response rates varying from 65-79%.

For clarification, we have now changed this to:

“The data used in this study is drawn from the seventh Tromsø Study conducted in 2015-2016 where all inhabitants of the municipality of Tromsø aged 40 and above were invited to participate (n=32,591). N =21,083 accepted the invitation giving a response rate of 65%, figure 1. The Tromsø Study is an ongoing longitudinal population-based cohort study among adult inhabitants in the municipality of Tromsø in Northern Norway, which started in 1974. The Tromsø study is a collaborative study in the interface between epidemiology and clinical medicine, including a main study that comprised a screening visit, three questionnaires, and several follow-up studies [44].” (line 132-138)

6. The rationale for the questions selected from the Tromsø Study remain unclear. Why were self-reported health, gender, age, education, income, religiosity and ethnicity the only variables included in this study?

These associations are found to associate differently for users of T&CM compared to non-users in previous studies, and therefore used also in this study.

“The users of TM have shown to differ differently from the non-users of TM than the users of CM differ from non-users of such treatment modalities. While the users of TM have low socioeconomical status [9], the users of CM have higher education and income compared to the non-users [40, 41].” (line 121-123)
Heather S Boon (Reviewer 3):

1. The authors have adequately addressed my earlier comments. I note that the manuscript would still benefit from a thorough edit for English grammar prior to publication.

Thank you. The manuscript has now been through edit for English grammar.