Author’s response to reviews

Title: What is the financial incentive to immigrate? An analysis of salary disparities between Health Workers working in the Caribbean and popular destination countries

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Author’s response to reviews:

Previous Title: Escaping the Islands: A review of the economic incentives for Caribbean Health Workers to migrate abroad Gavin George; Bruce Rhodes; Christine Laptiste BMC Health Services Research

New Title: What is the financial incentive to immigrate? An analysis of salary disparities between Health Workers working in the Caribbean and popular destination countries

Reviewer 1

Comment

The title refers to "a review of the economic incentives... to migrate" yet the analysis is restricted to a single incentive: the wage gap. Related to this point, throughout the paper the authors appear to equate economic incentives with financial ones; the former are a much larger group.

Response

This title had been altered in the previous iteration. We have once again slightly modified the title to more accurately reflect the content and focus of the manuscript.
New Title: What is the financial incentive to immigrate? An analysis of salary disparities between Health Workers working in the Caribbean and popular destination countries

Comment

The abstract states that the paper "...establishes... the extent to which [the wage gap] contributes to an economic incentive to migrate"; quantifying this gap does not constitute a demonstration of the extent to which it provides an economic incentive to migrate.

Response

We have furthermore altered the abstract. The line in question now reads:

“This study adds to limited available literature on HRH salaries within the Caribbean region and establishes the wage gap between selected Caribbean and popular destination countries.”

Comment

In their discussion, the authors claim to have evaluated and compared HRH salaries in the included Caribbean and destination countries, when in fact they have only done the latter. Evaluating these salaries would involve a comprehensive assessment of them against some pre-determined criteria.

Response

The opening line of the discussion states:

“This study evaluated HRH salaries of selected health cadres across selected Caribbean countries and compared them with the salaries on offer in three popular destination countries.”

We believe this accurately reflects what we have achieved in this manuscript. We wanted to determine if there was a wage gap in real terms and the extent of that wage gap in relation to literature which postulates that migration is fueled the lure of better wages.
Comment

In their conclusion, the authors state that their findings "...could be used for policy changes focusing on salary and benefit adjustments, aimed at retaining HRH to the public health system within the Caribbean region." How exactly do the authors envision this happening? Are they suggesting the HRH wage gap is not already considered by HRH planners in the Caribbean working to retain the region's HRH? It seems more likely to me that Caribbean HRH planners are already keenly conscious of this gap, and yet there is little they can do to address it given the fiscal realities of the countries involved. The practical value of the paper is therefore not clear to me - this was also a problem in the earlier version.

Response

We have modified the concluding paragraph which now reads:

“This study contributes to a greater understanding of the extent of the salary disparity between the Caribbean and popular destination countries across HRH cadres. The financial incentive for Caribbean HRH to seek work abroad remains strong when considering differences in the cost of living, even for HRH with little career experience. Governments therefore have to consider the earning potential abroad when formulating policies and strategies aimed at retaining health professionals.”

The value of the paper rests on the fact that we have quantified the wage gap between selected Caribbean and destination countries. There is a significant amount of literature that claims that the prospect of better wages abroad acts as a significant pull factor, without ever quantifying the salary difference. Where literature has provided approximate differences no other study has adopted this particular methodology.

Comment

I take no issue with the authors' methods or analyses, and I applaud their interest in better managing HRH migration from developing countries. While I recognizing this is ultimately the editors' decision, I do not think these findings warrant a paper in a scientific journal; I think alternative means of disseminating them would be more appropriate. For example, the OECD publishes similar data for generalist and specialist physicians in member countries through its OECD.STAT platform.
Comment

We disagree with the reviewer. We feel that this paper adds tremendous value for the reasons stated above. Again we have literature making the point that migration is fueled by the prospect of better wages without articulating the extent of the wage differential – this paper is the first to quantify that gap for Caribbean health workers. There have been other papers published which have undertaken similar analysis in other countries and on other professions, suggesting there is appetite for these findings in the scientific community. These publications include:

1. http://joe.ukzn.ac.za/Libraries/No_63_2015/Teacher_salary_differentials_using_Purchasing_Power_Parity_PPP_A_South_African_perspective_as_both_a_source_and_destination_country.sflb.ashx


Reviewer 2

Comments

The contribution of this paper is to provide actual figures, using purchasing power parity (PPP) exchange rates, of the salary disparity for HRH between the Caribbean and 3 popular destination countries (US, UK and Canada). A strength of this study is that the authors used PPP ratios for the wage comparisons. However, the data does not allow to determine the relative importance of the differences in purchasing power in influencing health workers migration from the Caribbean to the destination countries.

Response

We have altered the title which I think addresses this concern. It was never the intention to determine the extent to which the wage gap influences migration. The objective of this study was
to quantify the gap. We have therefore cleaned up the language in the title, discussion and conclusion section to ensure consistency with regards to the purpose of this manuscript.

Comment

In my opinion, it is not correct to state in the title that this paper is about economic factors influencing migration. This paper documents very precisely the salary disparities between HRH in the Caribbean and popular destination countries but nothing more.

Response

We have altered the title.

Comment

Line 286 - 289: should be moved to the discussion.

Response

We have moved this to the discussion section.

Comment

I'm missing in the discussion a reference to the WHO Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel.

Response

This code is now referenced within the discussion section.