Author’s response to reviews

Title: Wheelchairs users' perspectives on improving their access to services in Kenya and Philippines: a qualitative study

Authors:

Emma Williams (emma.williams@jhpiego.org)
Elizabeth Hurwitz (elizabeth.hurwitz@jhpiego.org)
Immaculate Obaga (immaculateobaga@gmail.com)
Brenda Onguti (brenda.onguti@jhpiego.org)
Tyrone Sy (tsy@up.edu.ph)
Adovich Rivera (adovich.rivera@gmail.com)
R. Kirby (Kirby@dal.ca)
Jamie Noon (Jnoon319@aol.com)
Deepti Tanuku (Deepti.tanuku@jhpiego.org)
Anthony Gichangi (Anthony.gichangi@jhpiego.org)
Eva Bazant (eva.bazant@jhpiego.org)

Version: 1 Date: 30 Jan 2017

Author’s response to reviews:

Dear Dr. Mannan,

Thank you for forwarding the reviewers’ comments on our manuscript "Wheelchairs users' perspectives on improving their access to services in Kenya and Philippines: a qualitative study" (IHRR-D-16-00083). We believe that this feedback has led to an improved version of the manuscript, which we are submitting today. Below please find a point-by-point response to the comments.

Sincerely,

Emma Williams and co-authors
Reviewer # 1:

TITLE:

To emphasize the study sample of basic wheelchair users and the study aim of assessing access to wheelchair services, the study title could be revised to "Perspectives of basic wheelchair users on improving their access to wheelchair services in Kenya and Philippines: a qualitative study".

Response: We have made this edit.

BACKGROUND:

- To provide a comparison in global terms of disability rates, include a sentence outlining how the disability rates of 4.6% for Kenya and 1.41% for Manila are below that outlined in the World Report on Disability of approximately 15% of the world's population.

Response: We agree that this is interesting. We have mentioned the 15% figure in the background section, but have not discussed this in detail since it may reflect different measurement approaches.

METHODS:

- Please outline a rationale for why the study locations of Kenya and the Philippines were selected.

Response: The donor requested us to include one country from Kenya and from Philippines. The study design required us to select countries in which wheelchairs are provided with and without services. We also needed substantial volume of wheelchair services to meet our sample size requirements. Based on the findings of a desk review, consultations with experts and field visits, Kenya and the Philippines were identified as countries that met all these criteria.

- The manuscript states that "Study participants were a subset of participants in a survey of 852 wheelchair users in Kenya and the Philippines conducted between December 2014 and February March 2015. The methods of the survey have been described in detail elsewhere [16]." However, it does not provide sufficient information about how this qualitative data fits into this study. Why is only the qualitative data presented here?

Response: We found that it was not feasible to write a paper with combined findings, because of journal word count limits and the complexity of the data, so we decided to write two separate papers. A manuscript based on the quantitative findings has been submitted to a journal, and we
have added a reference to it. We have add more explanation in the methods about the rationale for including the qualitative sample.

- Please explicitly outline why a differentiation was made between participants greater and less than 45 years of age.

Response: We had no reliable information about the reasons for wheelchair use in these settings, and the age distribution of wheelchair users. However, we thought that there might be differences by age. We did not know what the life expectancy was for wheelchair users in these settings, so we selected 45 as a relatively low cut-off for “older” users. We have added further explanation in the text.

- The reader could benefit from inclusion in the manuscript of the interview guide used.

Response: We appreciate this suggestion and have uploaded this as a supplementary file.

RESULTS:

- The manuscript states that "In both countries, the sample was evenly divided by gender and being currently married or not". However, 63% of the Kenyan sample reported never being married or being currently divorced - please revise this statement.

Response: That’s correct; we have rephrased this sentence accordingly.

- More supporting evidence is needed across categories. For example, findings categorized under 'Prescription or selection, funding and ordering' require supporting quotes.

Response: We have added a supporting quote to that section. We have tried to balance the need to provide sufficient detail and the need to keep the article’s total word count at a reasonable length.

- All quotes need to include more information regarding their source (such as both nationality and age), if possible to do so without compromising anonymity, so that it is transparent if findings represent a variety of participants or a small number of dominant participants.
Response: We have created a respondent ID for the manuscript purposes only, with either K or P to designate country.

- Please explain why Steps 1 and 2 and Steps 3 and 4 are combined while other steps are outlined separately. Step 5 is also omitted.

Response: We had revised the methods section to explain this more clearly.

DISCUSSION

Editing is needed to correct grammatical errors throughout the article, and to ensure that concepts are presented clearly. For example, the Discussion section includes statements that could be clearer such as "Well-timed services sometimes facilitated the process of obtaining an appropriate wheelchair" and "The qualitative study findings complement the findings of the quantitative survey, which found that elements of service delivery were associated improved functioning in both countries [16]."

Response: Thank you for pointing this out; we have rephrased these sentences and others.

To illustrate further, the Discussion section outlines that the qualitative data "demonstrated contextual factors that could affect the findings of future studies but are difficult to measure in a survey, such as having peer support, an enabling social and policy environment, and reduced stigma". However, the policy environment is not mentioned throughout the article. Therefore, please ensure that clear statements based on the findings are presented.

Response: That’s correct. We removed the reference to the policy environment.

Reviewer #2

However, several crucial improvements need to be considered before this article is ready for print.

On the section "Background": this section should include stat of the art research on the area. Much of this literature is presented later in the article, and it should be lifted forward.

Response: We have shifted some discussion forward as suggested.
On "Results" Line 4 -25: The description of the sample/participants is not a result, and should be presented under Method.

Response: The sampling approach was described in the Methods section, under the “Qualitative interviews” section. We would like to keep Lines 4-25 in the Results section, since this information was obtained through the survey data collection.

The sample/participants are not described clear enough. For clarity, the authors should consider to present this section in a table. When the sample consist of 48 individuals, percentage does not give any meaning. Write the actual numbers, and maybe percentage in brackets.

Response: Currently both numbers and percentages are given, which allows readers to review either.

The study is built on qualitative interviews in Kenya and the Philippines, and one would expect a comparative study. This is not the case, as the authors state that the findings are similar between the two countries, and they chose to present it as one data material. The authors should consider cutting out references to country, eg. as in "Steps 1-2" line 33 and 48. References to countries when describing qualitative findings from a small sample takes away the attention from what may be interesting findings from this study.

Response: This suggestion contradicts the request from another reviewer that we provide more information about the respondents. Therefore, we have not taken this suggestion.

The study is weakened because of its quasi-quantitative approach, which unfortunately is all too common in qualitative studies: detailed procedures of coding, but a rather brief and superficial analysis, which adds little to new knowledge about the research topic. The study presented here is not a survey, and as such not representative for either Kenya or the Philippines. There is no need to tie particular topics, findings, or quotes to one or the other of the countries.

Response: We have added more detail about the analysis. We respectfully disagree that this study adds no new information, since so few studies have discussed wheelchair services provision in these settings. We have edited the discussion sections to clarify that this study was by no means representative.

The article lacks a description of the analytical perspective that has guided the study.
Response: We have added more information about the analytical perspective to the methods section.

My main concerns are about the sections Results and Discussion:

The section "Results" gives a brief description of the sample, structured according to WHO's guidelines. It is neither discussed later in the article nor tied to relevant research or other literature.

Response: We have revised the discussion section.

The section "Discussion" is a mix of results, discussion, strengths and weaknesses of the study. It is not well structured. Use of subheads could clear this up. Findings under "Discussion" are presented and tied to other relevant research. Much of this research should be presented in the introduction of the article.

Response: We have added subheadings and moved some of the relevant research has been mention in the introduction.

Some findings presented here are not presented under Results. One should not introduce new findings under the section Discussion, but discuss the findings already presented. This is a major weakness of the article.

Response: We have revised the results and discussion with this comment in mind.

The introduction under "Discussion" states: "Well-timed services sometimes facilitated the process of obtaining an appropriate wheelchair". This is confusing at this is not my impression when I read the "Results".

Response: Thank you for pointing this out. We have edited the results and discussion sections accordingly.

Recommendations for service development and recommendations for further research should be presented separately, with subheads, and not under "Discussion". As it is now, these topics are intertwined in findings, discussion, references to other research, and reflection over findings.
Response: We have added subheadings.

Conclusion should refer to the main topics under "Discussion" and point forward, for instance summing up crucial elements in an efficient model for service delivery. The Conclusion, as it is written here, is actually not a conclusion, and should be rewritten.

Response: We have reworded the conclusion.

I would advise the authors to work through the data material once more, analysing it explicitly according to the state of the art literature in order to present new insights. The authors need to restructure the article thoroughly.

Response: Please see revised manuscript.

Reviewer #2: See the attached document

Suggestions for improvement of this study would include building more of a case for this study in the background. Introducing what studies have come before this along with current research gaps would be of benefit. In particular with reference to wheelchair users perspectives of services and wheelchair skills training it will assist to build the case for this research.

Response: Thank you for this suggestion. We have edited the background section and also noted the lack of research in this area.

Under the methods and results the WHO guidance for wheelchair service provision was used as a framework. However in presentation of results it may be helpful to layout what themes and issues under each of these headings were found. This could be completed as sub-sections under these headings.

Response: We think that the sections for the each step are too short to merit subheadings.

The quantitative part of the study was mentioned but more information on this and how it relates would be helpful.
Response: We have added more information in the background, methods and discussion sections, as well as an updated reference to the quantitative manuscript, which is under review by another journal.

Additionally in the recommendations sections it may be some of the recommendations are built form the combination of knowledge between the quantitative and qualitative studies. It may be helpful to go over this section and unpack what was found in this particular qualitative study and the specific recommendations from this.

Response: Thank you for this insight. We have edited the recommendations accordingly.

Below are more specific suggestions for each heading.

Title: When saying “service” may be clearer to specify wheelchair services as could be interpreted access to all services (as in general health or other services being wheelchair friendly).

Response: We agree and have edited the manuscript accordingly.

Background

There is little discussion on previous research on perspectives of wheelchair users to access and wheelchair skills training– has there been research on this before in similar settings? Has there been research in different for example in high income settings that may have relevance?

Response: Research as has been extremely limited in this area, and this is one reason we feel this article merits publication. More research has been done in high income settings, but in these settings wheelchair services are provided by highly trained medical professionals in the context of ongoing medical care. In our study settings, many wheelchairs are provided without any services. When services are provided, the training of those providing services varies widely.

If so this would help relate findings to past research. If there was not - mentioning this lack of research would help build the case for this study.

Response: We have added more discussion of the lack of evidence.
What is the evidence for use of wheelchair services and wheelchair skills training in terms of effectiveness? It is discussed more research is needed in recommendations section but more information on this in background would be helpful.

Response: We have added more information about this in the background section.

When building the case for the rights of persons to have access to wheelchairs it may help to mention that wheelchairs were found to be in the top 50 priority assistive products list recently developed by WHO this year. [http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/207694/1/WHO_EMP_PHI_2016.01_eng.pdf?ua=1]

Response: Thank you for mentioning this. We have incorporated this suggestion.

Referencing
Line 8 - state most wheelchair users cannot afford – ensure reference is in place (I think this may be from reference 2).

Response: We have corrected this.

Line 23/24 – Discussing guidelines on provision and service provision of wheelchairs and reference WHO wheelchair service training package. However also reference postpartum care WHO guidelines and unsure of relevance (reference 6)

Response: Thank you for alerting us to this error.

Line 26 – two references in in brackets (2,6) in middle of sentence. Post partum care guidelines reference 6 also mentioned here – unsure of relevance.

Response: Thank you for alerting us to this error.

Grammar/Style
Line 31-38 – May be clearer if broken into two sentences.

Response: Thank you, we have taken this suggestion.
Line 41 – end bracket present.
Response: Noted and corrected.

Line 43 – look at sentence structure
Response: We have revised this for clarity.

Methods:
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Lines 4-9: Discusses screening question of service use. It may be helpful to clearly state that this was what you deemed criteria for whether they had access to services. Also may be helpful to mention if there was reason this particular statement was chosen to represent wheelchair service access.

Response: We have edited these lines accordingly. We needed a simple screening question and come up with this through discussion within the research team.

State why age (above/below) 45 years chosen for selection criteria?
Response: Please see response to previous reviewer.

Results were presented together as similar (Kenya/Phillipines) – was there any different in findings?
Response: We hesitate to discuss differences because these samples were not representative. Overall, the similarities were more striking than the differences. We have noted a few places where findings related only to the sample from one country.

Table 2. A lot of numbers – may be clearer if just the n (total) number given, or alternatively just the percentage. Are all headings necessary? Could some be discussed in text instead?
Response: Given contradictory review comments we left this table unchanged.
Results

Use of WHO wheelchair service provision as a framework. But under these heading more clarity on themes which emerged may be helpful. Sub-headings may help make this clearer.

Steps 1-2 - was access through social networks a theme?

Steps 3-4 - was more experience in wheelchair use and knowledge to actively select or request chairs a theme?

Step 6 – were donations of wheelchairs and users expectations around fitting and/or unawareness of need for fitting themes?

Response: We think that the sections for the each step are too short to merit subheadings.

Discussion

Line 22 – discusses how the findings complement the survey. More information on the key findings of the survey would be helpful in addition to the reference. This would help give more background information and could be included in this section also when building the case for research.

Response: We have added more information about the survey findings, but the purpose of the two analyses were different.

Discusses how this research fills a gap however this should be expanded more in background section.

Response: We have noted this in the background.

Recommendations for future research

Ensure all recommendations are based off the literature search and findings from this qualitative study. There can only be recommendations based off what you found through completing this study.

Response: We have edited the recommendations section based on this suggestion.
Line 26 – The second point may be best in a new paragraph. Talk of dearth of research of longitudinal outcomes and experimental studies. This does not seem to be following on from background results or discussion of this study. May be best to include this at earlier stage if making a recommendation on it.

Response: We have removed the discussion of this point.

Line 34/35 – I would avoid making a statement on what type of study for evaluating wheelchair skills training (e.g. experimental or quasi-experimental) from this research. It also may be helpful to note what current research on wheelchair skills training is in background section.

Response: We have removed the discussion of this point.

Line 37-45 This may be a better fit in discussion section over recommendations section

Response: We have moved this paragraph so that it is no longer under the recommendations heading.

Line 48 – The paragraph on how findings from this study may relate to other technologies - this may be better in discussion section being backed up by research of similarities from other technologies. You have referenced the Borg study on access to assistive technologies in low resourced settings so this study could build on this in discussion to make this point.

Response: We do not fully understand this recommendation.