Author’s response to reviews

Title: A survey of pharmacists' perception of foundation level competencies in African countries

Authors:

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Author’s response to reviews:

Dear Reviewers,

We thank you for taking the time to review our manuscript and provide feedback. We have carried out edits to the manuscript in line with your comments. These are in red font in the updated manuscript and the specific details are also provided below.

Reviewer #1:

Dear Authors,

The present study has valuable finding with a new scientific method through cooperation of African countries representatives to collect data. It is very useful for studies with an international scope, however, data collection does not show a clear and specific method and procedure of sampling and therefore it is highly scattered. That is, 90% of the responses are from only for countries which bear a serious doubt of its possible generalization to other countries. It seems that this issue needs attentive care and perhaps should be addressed effectively. Following comments of review is available right here below and other points worth noting is organized in a table below.
- Sentence Structure
- Scientific writing
- Native speech editing

Reviewer points of view

All article sections:

1. Sentence Structure

2. Scientific writing

3. Native speech editing

Title:

1. Since cross sectional studies are routine research it is not essential to mention it in the title. Year of research could be included though.

2. The title needs to be altered. The word foundation seems irrelevant.

Author Ans: The title of this manuscript has been edited to read "A survey of pharmacists’ perception of foundation level competencies in African countries".

The word "foundation" was not removed from the title as its use in this context is in keeping with the two recognised and distinct cadres of pharmacy practice: "foundation level" and "advanced level" practice. It is therefore imperative for the title to reflect this as only the foundation level competencies are evaluated in the study reported in this manuscript.
Abstract:

1. It has to be meticulously changed according to the changes in the article body

2. Method section needs more elaboration. Topics like time, place, study population, sample size, sampling method, type of the analyses should be mentioned concisely.

3. In finding section, the results should be mentioned in summery.

4. Conclusion section needs to be written according to what is brought in the article body.

5. Keywords are critical and they are absent in the abstract. Authors must include a number of keywords, preferably checked with MESH.

Author Ans: The Abstract has been edited as suggested and the details included from line 10 to 29. Key words have also been included.

Introduction:

1. About elaboration on the necessity of this study benefits and complications should be mentioned

Author Ans: further details on points 1 and 2 has been included in line 53 – 66.

2. Noting the fact that it has been previously conducted in other countries, it is worth mentioning their findings as well.

Author Ans: Details of these have been included in line 76 - 80
3. To mention the study aim at the end of the introduction, only the main aim as a sole one should be mentioned clearly in one sentence.

Author Ans: The aim of this study has been updated as suggested in line 80 – 82

Method:

1. Study design and method should be explained in a step by step manner and analyses of the findings should be together with the aim of applying that analyses in complete.

Author Ans: The method section has been edited for clarity with details on survey period, the sampling & survey dissemination in line 86 - 106. The specific aim of each of the statistical tests used is also included in Line 135-143. The list of organisations contacted to participate in this study is provided in appendix 1 of the supplementary material.

2. Organization of country responsible for the study should be mentioned. Its initiation, supports and acknowledgments.

Author Ans: The list of organisations contacted to participate in this study is provided in appendix 1 of the supplementary material.

3. In data collection section the following points need to be included; time period which data was collected, method of follow ups on gathering the data, criterion which the data collection was finalized, data quality control, sample size in each country based on the sample size criterion, inclusion and exclusion of participants' questionnaires. Ethical considerations should be included as well.

Author Ans: These details have been included in the method section as indicated above. Ethical considerations are included in line 145 to 155.
4. In the analysis part please address the internal validity of the collected data.

Author Ans: The data was collected electronically, without transformation and a previous validated questionnaire was used. This is clarified in line 108 -109, and 118 to 121.

5. All statistical methods which was applied should be mentioned together with their specific objectives. For example, tests applied for homogeneity of the data should be included and the reason for applying should be mentioned in the methods part.

Author Ans: These details have been included and the analysis section updated accordingly in line 135 to 143.

findings:

1. Likewise to the methods section it has to be written crystal clear.

2. Findings are not expressed and explained properly.

3. Consecutive order of the tables should be considered.

4. All applied statistics tests and their application reason should be moved and explained in the methods section. (currently findings and methods are mixed)

5. Purpose of analyses for inter-country variability tests should be explained clearly and it should be mentioned in methods section.

6. Findings are not coherent and their relationship with methods seems unclear and independent.
7. Demographic characteristics of the participants is no included.

8. Figure captions should be written below them.

Author Ans:

- Points 1 to 8 have been addressed in the body of the manuscript.

- The methods section has been edited as suggested above, and Tables numbered consecutively.

- The specifics on the statistical tests that were previously included in the findings section have been moved to the analysis section in line 135 to 143.

- The test for inter-country variability have been edited for clarity in line 139-143. Demography have also been edited for clarity and details included in line 158 to 166.

- Table caption have not been moved as its current location was informed by the journal guidelines.

Discussion:

1. Noting excellent interpretation of the author, it is suggested that more relevant international studies should be included and compared.

Author Ans: International studies in others areas of health practice have been included in lines 280-81, 317 to 324, 326 to 339.

2. There is no need to refer to tables in the discussion part.

Author Ans: Reference to tables in the discussions section have been deleted as advised.
3. Suggestions should be included in the findings section based on each presented result.

Author Ans: The study findings are further discussed in line 304 – 310, 315 – 322, 326 to 339

Reviewer #2:

Congratulations to the authors for writing an interesting manuscript on a topic of significant importance to the pharmacy community. The topic and focus of this work is highly relevant to the continuing evolution of the pharmacy profession.

Overall, the manuscript demonstrated a high level of quality: a rigorous development and validation process was described and the application of the tool to the 4 countries described yielded important findings. The manuscript itself was well written and easy to read.

Some thoughts for the authors to consider to enhance the quality of the work:

a) While Africa was the context for the analysis, the four countries described may or may not have important cultural and practice related differences that could affect the applicability of a continent wide tool. For naive readers such as myself, some additional detail regarding the practice contexts of these different countries would be useful.

Author Ans: Published literature that suggest similarities in practice profile between the countries have been included in line 307 to 313.

b) The finding related to lack of "interest" in reporting of medication incidents and near misses is very important to quality use of medicines. The authors provide a cursory discussion of this point, but further elaboration would be helpful. In particular, local cultural practices around the roles of health professionals and the meaning of "error" would likely be important to explaining this finding. I don't feel the authors have spent enough time on this important point; further examination in the literature of error management practices among African health care providers might help to explain/align these findings for the reader.

Author Ans: Additional details on this in relation to the context in these countries has been included in line 304 to 310.
c) It may be helpful to provide further explanation regarding the importance and potential impact of this work, in particular the next steps that work such as this could produce. This is briefly mentioned, but in such scant detail that it is easy to miss.

Author Ans: Details for future research included in line 372 to 378

d) A more thoughtful discussion of methodological limitations of this work would be helpful; the highly quantitative approach the authors have taken is certainly useful, but does not necessarily provide the insight necessary to support the conclusions related to emerging standardized competencies that have been made. The authors do note that selection bias and sample size issues limit broader applicability of their work, but without additional qualitative follow-up work I believe it will be challenging to make the case that this emerging consensus is actually real, and not simply a statistical artifact. I believe this study is well constructed and thoughtfully described, and while necessary, it is insufficient to support the conclusions that have been made, without clearer signposting of limitations and next steps.

Author Ans: Details for future research included in line 373 to 379

e) The work is localized within the pharmacy community, but it would be helpful to include reference to similar work that may have been undertaken in other health professions, to provide readers with a comparative context. The thorny issue of self-selection bias is of course important in any study of this sort, but particularly within this African context may require further elaboration.

Author Ans: Reference to medical practice has been included in line 319 to 324. Further details on self-selection bias and methodological flaws in this research have been included in line 351 to 354

I hope these comments are helpful; overall, the authors have provided important insights into an issue of relevance and importance, and I recommend this manuscript be moved ahead for publication, if the authors are able to address the concerns addressed above. Thank you.