Author's response to reviews

Title: An Institutional Approach to Support the Conduct and Use of Health Policy and Systems Research: The Nodal Institute in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

Authors:

Fadi El-Jardali (fe08@aub.edu.lb)
Shadi Saleh (ss117@aub.edu.lb)
Rawya Khodor (rmk43@mail.aub.edu)
Chokri Arfa (chokri_arfa@yahoo.fr)
Habiba Ben Romdhane (habibabr@yahoo.fr)
Raeda Abu AL Rub (raeda70@just.edu.jo)
Randah R Hamadeh (randah@agu.edu.bh)

Version: 2 Date: 24 April 2015

Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear HARPS Editorial Team,

We extend our deep gratitude to the journal’s editorial team and the reviewers for their helpful and insightful comments. We are pleased to include below a point by point response to each of the comments raised by the reviewers along with reference to associated changes made in the body of the manuscript.

**Reviewer One**

**Reviewer one comment:** This is a relevant and key study that will improve the discourse on building capacity for HPSR. The team of authors is appropriate and relevant although the team does not have policy makers from three countries in the EMR – those included are from research/academic institutes.

**Authors’ Response:** We thank the reviewer for the kind note and are delighted to learn that the manuscript is deemed of merit and quality. It is noteworthy to mention that one author of the team, Dr. Habiba Ben Romdhane, was a former Minister of Health (policy maker) in Tunisia and is currently a researcher at her respective academic institute.

We extend our best efforts below to address the helpful comments in order to further improve the quality, rigor and readability of this manuscript.

**Reviewer one comment:** The methods section is very well described by the authors and the five-phase figure helps the reader to articulate the process and anticipated outputs at each phase. The authors mention and describe the application of qualitative methods but there is no description of the analysis of qualitative data.

**Authors’ Response:** We thank the reviewer for the valuable response. This has been addressed in the revised version of the manuscript (kindly refer to page 8).
Reviewer one comment: It would reinforce/support some of the statements under the sections on results if some relevant quotes were included to reveal the depth of the meaning and dimensions captured in the study. For example, statements on how various stakeholders in the three the countries would use the identified HPSR priorities to translate into specific research questions to address evidence.

Authors’ Response: We agree with the reviewer’s comment. A separate paragraph at the end of the results section (kindly refer to page 13) has been added to include statements on how various stakeholders in the three countries will use the identified HPSR priorities to translate into specific research questions.

Reviewer one comment: The first paragraph under results restricts the results to mapping “The results of the mapping of regional academic/research institutions involved in HPSR present the findings of three main issues: 1) regional areas of involvement of academic/research institutions in HPSR, 2) commonly identified regional HPSR focus areas, and 3) commonly identified regional HPSR challenges.” Where are the results on capacity building which lead to the conclusions highlighted in the abstract and main text?

Authors’ Response: We appreciate the reviewer’s comment. It is worth noting that the results of the mapping activity that emerged provide general guidance on what regional areas of involvement of academic/research institutions in HPSR and HPSR focus areas should be the focus for capacity building. While exploring capacity building areas was beyond the focus of our paper, we are planning to conduct a specific capacity building study to assess capacity building areas in the Sub-Nodes.

Reviewer one comment: There authors should correct errors in labeling/referencing as evidenced on pages 10 and 25 – under results the second paragraph suggests that results on areas of involvement of academic/research institutions in HPSR are presented in figure 2, yet on page 25 the results are labelled and presented in figure 1.

Authors’ Response: We acknowledge the reviewer’s comment. This has been addressed in the revised version.

Reviewer one comment: Having indicated, last sentence of the first paragraph under the results section, that 32 of 50 institutions were involved in HPSR, why do the authors state in the second paragraph that 27 institutions (about 54%) focused on information etc. Should the denominator be 32 or 50 institutions since about 18 were not engaged in any HPSR work?

Authors’ Response: The revised version of the manuscript re-presents the figures with the denominator of 32 (for the calculation of percentage), in the text and in figure 2.
Reviewer one comment: It is not clear why the Authors use opted to use ‘Box 1 to 3’ instead of tables to present key results. I suggest these be labelled as tables rather than boxes. Boxes are commonly used to highlight or emphasize a key message/point rather than present main results.

Authors’ Response: We understand the reviewer’s comment. However, the authors did not consider the information presented are congruent with the classical labeling as a table.

Reviewer one comment: Limitations are not clearly stated in the paper

Authors’ Response: The limitation section has been strengthened in the revised version (kindly refer to page 16).

Reviewer one comment: However, I recommend that they look at the series of paper published under this title “Institutional capacity for health systems research in East and Central Africa schools of public health: ....” Health Research Policy and Systems 2014, 12:22. Series of papers published from the CHEPSAA program and incorporate relevant information on mapping of institutional capacities for HSR/HPSR relevant to this study. These can be incorporated under the section on LMICs.

Authors’ Response: We highly appreciate the reviewer comment. The revised version has included valuable information from the “Institutional capacity for health systems research in East and Central African schools of public health: enhancing capacity to design and implement teaching programs” paper as well as information from a paper published from the CHEPSAA program. In addition, an example on a mapping exercise that was conducted by the Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research to develop the WHO Health Systems Research Strategy was included.

Reviewer one comment: Title: It is unclear whether the title should highlight the use of ‘case’ to refer to who conducted the study as opposed to where the study was conducted. The results and conclusions sections in the abstract should be re-written to reflect the objectives and methods applied in this study.

Authors’ Response: We agree with the reviewer suggestion. The title has been modified. Additionally, the results and conclusion sections were re-written in the abstract of the revised version of the manuscript.
§ Keywords: Consider adding ‘HPSR institutional capacity assessment’ to the list of keywords

Authors’ Response: The revised version has addressed the valuable comment of the reviewer.
Reviewer Two

Reviewer two comment: Major Compulsory Revisions: Information on ethical clearance need to be included. Also a description of the data collection using qualitative method should be adequately described. If data was obtained through interviews, was an interview guide used? Who conducted the interview? How many respondents were interviewed and for how long? The authors need to state clearly the dates the meetings were held and also how long each of the meetings lasted. They also need to state the participant selection criteria and how many individuals participated in each of the meetings.

Authors’ Response: We thank the reviewer for the valuable comments. We would like to clarify that the activities of the project included mapping of regional academic/research institutions involved in HPSR, two national deliberative meetings, and a regional meeting. The results presented in this paper have been delivered from these activities. No individual or group interviews were conducted.

Regarding the description of the data collection using qualitative method, statements were added to the method section where we further clarified that a mapping questionnaire composed of one closed-ended and two closed-ended questions was sent to academic/research institutions for the collection of their responses during a two-month period. In the results section, it was further stated that a total of 50 academic/research institutions were mapped, of which only 32 institutions were engaged in HPSR.

In reference to the comments regarding the meetings, we agree with the reviewer. The dates of the two national deliberate meetings and the regional meeting were included in figure 1 in the revised version of the manuscript. The revised version of the manuscript has also included how long each of the meetings lasted.

The comments regarding the selection criteria of participants and the number of individuals in each of the meetings have been addressed in the revised version of the manuscript.

Reviewer two comment: Minor Essential Revisions: No references were made in the "principal findings" section of the Discussion. Many of the statements made need to be attributed to references.

Authors’ Response: We acknowledge the reviewer’s comment. We would like to clarify that the "principal findings" section of the Discussion purely included discussions related to the results of this manuscript. A separate section, “findings in relation to previous studies” (kindly refer to page 16), links the findings of this manuscript with previous findings and attributes them to several references.
We sincerely hope our response and edits satisfactorily responds to the comments of our esteemed reviewers.

On behalf of the authors,

Shadi Saleh