Author's response to reviews

Title: Print media coverage of primary health care and related research evidence in South Africa

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Version: 4 Date: 5 October 2015

Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Editor,

We are grateful to you for considering this our manuscript and the reviewers for their comments. We have completed the revisions recommended by the reviewers. Please find our point-by-point responses to the reviewers’ comments in block letters below each comment.

Thanks for your kind consideration of the manuscript.

Sincerely,

Olagoke Akintola

Reviewer's report

Title: Print media coverage of primary health care and related research evidence in South Africa

Version: 2 Date: 14 April 2015

Reviewer: E Thompson

Reviewer's report:

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?

The authors clearly define the question that the research seeks to address and situate it within the context of a dearth in research.

THANK YOU FOR THIS COMMENT

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?

The method adopted by the authors is appropriate for the questions posed, but
with regards to policy implications, the paper could benefit from a more intimate qualitative analysis which will illuminate and guide policy direction and reform.

WE ADDRESS THIS POINT LATER WHERE IT CAME UP AGAIN

3. Are the data sound and well controlled?

The authors provide mainly percentages for their data. It would be helpful if the authors could provide some statistical analysis of the data to help explain the percentages and to show the relationships.

WE HAVE CONDUCTED CHI-SQUARE TEST FOR INDEPENDENCE FOR VARIOUS NEWSPAPER CHARACTERISTICS BY HEALTH SYSTEM ARRANGEMENT VARIABLES

It is also important to provide kappa scores for all the main variables coded in the reliability test.

WE USED A QUALITATIVE METHOD AND AN ITERATIVE PROCESS TO ENSURE RIGOR FOR THE THIRD PHASE OF DATA ANALYSIS. BOTH ASSESSORS MET REGULARLY TO REVIEW THE APPLICATION OF OUR METHOD. DURING THESE MEETINGS, WE REVIEWED EACH OF THE ARTICLES TOGETHER TO MAKE SURE THAT WE BOTH WERE ABLE TO EXTRACT ALL THE THEMES/TERMS POSSIBLE. WE DID NOT MEASURE KAPPA SCORES WHICH WOULD BE INAPPROPRIATE FOR A QUALITATIVE APPROACH.

The authors may want to take a second look at the reported figures. For instance on page 9 paragraph 4, the highest number of overlaps is presented as 7 but in figure 4 it is 6.

THANKS FOR THIS POINT. WE HAVE CHECKED AND REVISED ACCORDINGLY.

Again on page 9, the last paragraph, the authors suggest that there were 144 news stories published in provincial newspapers but in the next line, they give 136 news stories as the number of news stories published in provincial newspapers while table 2 indicates 147 news stories.

THE ISSUE WITH THE TALLY FOR THE PROVINCIAL NEWSPAPERS CAME ABOUT BECAUSE ONE OF THE NEWSPAPERS (THE POST) IS CIRCULATED IN TWO PROVINCES WHICH THROWS OFF THE TOTALS FOR PROVINCIAL NEWSPAPERS. WE DID MAKE A NOTE WITH AN ASTERICK BELOW THE TABLE IN THE PREVIOUS VERSION OF THE PAPER. WE HAVE NOW REVISED TABLE 1
AND RECODED THE POST NEWSPAPER AS A NATIONAL NEWSPAPER SINCE IT APPEARS IN MORE THAN ONE PROVINCE.

In table 2, some of the items do not add up. For instance Western Cape news articles is given as 41 but when one adds up the individual news articles, they come up to 40. Paragraph 2 page 10 gives 10 (5.8%) as stories discussing schools but table 3 gives 12 (6.9%) for the same issue.

AS STATED ABOVE, WE HAVE ADDRESSED THIS ISSUE BY REVISING THE TABLE

4. Do the figures appear to be genuine, i.e. without evidence of manipulation?

As indicated above, some of the numbers in tables require a second look to reflect what is in the write up or vice versa.

THIS POINT HAS BEEN ADDRESSED

5. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

The manuscript is largely presented well, however, it could benefit from some presentation revisions. For instance, “principal findings” and “findings in relation to other studies” must all be presented discussion. Findings are similar to results
and should be deleted. Also “strengths and limitations must be placed before conclusions. “Implication for further research” may be more appropriate after “strengths and limitations”

WE APPRECIATE THIS COMMENT. WE HAVE REVISED THE DISCUSSION TO REMOVE REPETITION BUT PLEASE NOTE THAT WE FOLLOW THE FORMAT FOR STRUCTURED DISCUSSIONS RECOMMENDED BY MICHAEL DOCHERTY AND RICHARD BMJ. 1999 MAY 8; 318(7193): 1224–1225. AS SUCH WE HAVE KEPT THE FORMAT BUT REMOVED REPETITION FROM THE DISCUSSION TO IMPROVE THE FLOW

6. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

The discussion is interesting and has potential but requires some more analysis. For example do the media systems in South Africa influence what the media publishes? The main problem of the research is to “explore how the print media covers primary health care and related research evidence”. Presenting descriptives alone does not do justice to the problem; providing some more statistical analysis might help. Some explanation of media ownership and management systems may help to explain some of the issues covered better.

WE CONDUCTED INFERENTIAL STATISTIAL ANALYSIS (CHI-SQUARE TEST OF INDEPENDENCE) USING NEWSPAPER CHARACTERISTICS AND HEALTH SYSTEM VARIABLES INCUDING NEWPAPAPER OWNERSHIP AND PROVINCIAL VS NATIONAL COVERAGE.

discussion of provincial newspapers and national newspapers may also help explain why the former provided more stories on primary health care and where policy maker may want to disseminate policy information. The authors could provide some background about media in South Africa and how they relate to health and policy issues to set the stage for the discussion.

WE FOUND NO LITERATURE ON THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN HEALTH POLICY IN SOUTH AFRICA SPECIFICALLY. HOWEVER, WE HAVE INCLUDED A DISCUSSION OF THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN INFLUENCING POLICY IN SOUTH AFRICA IN THIS VERSION. WE ALSO INCLUDED INFORMATION ABOUT THE OWNERSHIP OF MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA
Page 13 paragraph two: The point the authors make in this paragraph is unclear. What is the information provided that supports an understanding of issues needed for strengthening primary health care?? Again what is the information provided that strengthens policy making?

WE HAVE REVISED THIS PHRASE TO MAKE IT CLEARER

Page 13 last paragraph: you may want to discuss the primary health care policy's stance on rape and sexual violence and help us understand whether it is a primary issue or like the media coverage it is not highlighted.

WE REVISED TO INCLUDE A DISCUSSION OF RAPE IN SOUTH AFRICA AND RELATED IT TO MEDIA COVERAGE

Implications

The authors present some implications of the paper for policy but the link is not clear. How does knowing what health issues media cover help direct policy?

The finding that issues relating to accountability of the state in financing and delivery of primary health care services received most coverage does not tell us much about what was actually in the news. It could be that such issues received coverage because the state was making itself more accountable or opening up its books for scrutiny. It could also reflect what policy holders were making available to the public about state financial accountability and thus a reflection of the information provided to the media by policy makers.

WE HAVE CONDUCTED A STATISTICAL ANALYSIS THAT HELPS US INTERPRET THE DATA BETTER. WE ARE CURRENTLY PREPARING A QUALITATIVE PAPER THAT EXPLORES THE ISSUES REPORTED IN NEWSPAPERS IN MORE DETAIL. WE COULD NOT INCLUDE ADDITIONAL ANALYSIS IN THIS VERSION BECAUSE OF WORD LIMITATIONS

Some of the implications are a little stretched. Also, I am not sure how limited coverage of rape and sexual violence shows a lack of, or poor knowledge about
primary health care services primary health care services for survivors of

rape, or low levels of health seeking behaviour of survivors. It might a result of
the definition of “news worthiness” used by the media.

WE HAVE REVISED THIS BY INCLUDING A DISCUSSION OF LITERATURE ON
RAPE IN SOUTH AFRICA AND MEDIA COVERAGE OF RAPE

If indeed limited coverage of rape and sexual violence can be related to lack of
“proper print media coverage of such stories”, what can policy making in health
do about the issue? Should this not be a call on media regulators or owners?

WE INCLUDED A FURTHER DISCUSSION OF THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE
FINDING ABOUT THE COVERAGE OF RAPE BY MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS AND WE
ALSO USE THE GATEKEEPING THEORY TO ILLUMINATE THIS FINDING
7. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?

8. Is the writing acceptable?

Yes but some minor revisions and editing is required.

WE HAVE CONDUCTED REVISIONS AS REQUESTED

Please make your report as constructive and detailed as possible in your comments so that authors have the opportunity to overcome any serious deficiencies that you find and please also divide your comments into the following categories:

-Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

The implication for policy is not clear. The authors also need to consider comments made under point 6 for other major issues that require consideration.

PLEASE SEE COMMENT 6 ABOVE. THIS POINT HAS BEEN ADDRESSED UNDER COMMENT 6

-Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

PLEASE SEE. ADDRESSED ABOVE

Page 12 paragraph 1 “this seems(s)”; This sentence on needs to be reworked. It sounds incomplete ie. Reflect the effects of the community care worker policy framework on what or who?

THANKS. WE REVISED TO MAKE IT CLEARER

-Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but
which the author can choose to ignore)

Consider including an in-depth thematic analysis of some of the stories to enhance policy implication.

WE ARE NOT ABLE TO REPORT OUR QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS WITHIN THE WORD LIMIT ALLOWED BY THE JOURNAL. AS STATED EARLIER, WE ARE CURRENTLY PREPARING A MANUSCRIPT THAT FOCUSES ON OUR QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests
Print media coverage of primary health care and related research evidence in South Africa

This is a well-written paper where the authors take an innovative approach to considering one of the interfaces between the public and policy-makers: a content analysis of print media. Strengths of the paper include the clear and detailed description of methodology, the number of newspapers analysed and the time period considered, as well as the analysis in relation to important policy developments in primary health care in South Africa. The findings are thought-provoking, particularly in relation to the lack of reporting of high-quality research studies on primary healthcare issues.

WE THANK THE REVIEWER FOR THE COMMENTS

The main limitation (acknowledged by the authors) is that other forms of media and non-English print media may more be more influential on both the public and policy-makers.

AS YOU NOTE, WE ACKNOWLEDGE THIS POSSIBILITY

I only have minor comments and suggestions for the authors.

Minor discretionary revisions
Abstract:

1. Findings (line 3): ‘related to clinics’ is a little unclear. Would PHC facilities be clearer for a wider audience? Also, related to the service, organisation or what?

WE EXPLAINED PRIMARY HEALTH CARE IN THE PRECEDING SENTENCE (WE REFER HERE TO THE PHC TERM/PHILOSOPHY NOT THE PHC CLINIC) AND IN DETAIL IN THE METHODS SECTION.

2. (line 8) instead of referring to organisation of care you could speak of health system level.

WE ACKNOWLEDGE THIS COMMENT BUT BELIEVE THAT THE CURRENT PHRASING CONVEYS THE MESSAGE MORE ACCURATELY

3. Conclusions: this seemed a little weak. The focus is more on the use of this methodology rather than the findings. Also lengthy.

WE HAVE REVISED THE DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION EXTENSIVELY

Introduction:

4. This is lengthy but mostly justified because of the need to explain about the approach.

WE ACKNOWLEDGE THIS COMMENT

Methods:

5. Do we have any idea of the general population coverage of the newspapers from SA that are included in LexisNexis?

IN THIS VERSION OF THE PAPER, WE HAVE REVISED TABLE 1 BY INCLUDING A COLUMN ON THE CIRCULATION NUMBERS OF NEWSPAPERS, WHICH WERE EXTRACTED FROM THE BUREAU OF CIRCULATION AND THE WEBSITES OF EACH NEWSPAPER

6. Did the absolute number of articles from the newspapers remain stable over time? This is important for understanding the pattern of PHC articles over time.

WE ADDRESSED THIS ISSUE IN THE FINDINGS SECTION OF THE PREVIOUS VERSION. WE ALSO USED A BAR CHART GRAPH (FIGURE 2) WHERE WE
PRESENTED AN ANALYSIS OF THE TOTAL AS WELL AS AVERAGE NUMBER OF NEWSPAPERS PER YEAR OVER THE STUDY PERIOD. THE LAST TWO COLUMNS OF TABLE 1 ALSO CONTAIN INFORMATION ABOUT THE NUMBER OF NEWSPAPERS ANALYSED OVER THE STUDY PERIOD.
7. How was the decision made about whether the article was primarily focused on PHC vs. a secondary interest or brief mention? Even if PHC is mentioned briefly it may still be carrying a powerful message about PHC.

WE WERE INTERESTED IN NEWS STORIES THAT FOCUSED ON PHC. THEREFORE WE USED EXPLICIT CRITERIA TO ASSESS THE NEWS STORIES THAT WE INCLUDED (THE CRITERIA IS INCLUDED AS AN APPENDIX IN THIS VERSION). THE EXPLICIT CRITERIA WAS DISCUSSED EXTENSIVELY AMONG THE AUTHORS BEFORE IT WAS APPLIED.

WE CHOSE TO FOCUS ON NEWS STORIES THAT HAVE SUBSTANTIAL PHC CONTENT TO MAKE THE DATA MANAGEABLE. A READING OF A SAMPLE OF NEWS STORIES SHOWED THAT THE APPLICATION OF OUR EXPLICIT CRITERIA HELPED IN SELECTING NEWSPAPERS THAT FOCUSED ON PHC.

8. Can you clarify about the inter-rater reliability measurements? How many people, assessing how many articles?

THIS INFORMATION IS PROVIDED IN DETAIL IN THE METHODS SECTION BUT WE HAVE REVISED THIS SECTION TO MAKE IT MORE EXPLICIT

9. Discussion is a bit repetitive. Try to cut back words and reduce the overlap between sections.

WE ADDRESSED THIS ISSUE EARLIER IN RESPONSE TO REVIEWER ONE’S COMMENT

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.