Author’s response to reviews

Title: European Health Examination Surveys - a tool for collecting objective information about the health of the population

Authors:
Hanna Tolonen (hanna.tolonen@thl.fi)
Päivikki Koponen (paivikki.koponen@thl.fi)
Ala'a Al-kerwi (Alaa.AlKerwi@lih.lu)
Nada Capkova (nadezda.capkova@szu.cz)
Simona Giampaoli (simona.giampaoli@iss.it)
Jennifer Mindell (j.mindell@ucl.ac.uk)
Laura Paalanen (laura.paalanen@thl.fi)
Maria Ruiz-Castell (maria.ruiz@lih.lu)
Antonia Trichopoulou (atrichopoulou@hhf-greece.gr)
Kari Kuulasmaa (kari.kuulasmaa@thl.fi)

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Reviewer reports:

Reviewer #1: It is not a classical paper with a research question, description of methods, results and discussion. However, the topic of this paper is very relevant for public health. The paper describes the European work to establish a framework for HES. The HES is essential for specific health data that can not be derived from other sources, and, in combination with other sources provide relevant material for both public health and scientific research. The HES is a basic part of a National and International (European) health data infrastructure.
- In general I think the why of the paper can be more specific. Also: what is the key message? Is it to make the HES more knowledgeable, or is it mainly an appeal for investments and standardization? I also miss a reflection on innovation in this field

Reply: We have modified text at the end of the Introduction to provide a better description of the aims of this paper.

We have edited discussion to state our key message more clearly. The key message is that not all EU Member States have a national HES which could provide a wide range of valuable information to support information based health policy making and planning of prevention activities. And that there are established actions which have been found to be useful to support national actions towards a national HES but these require long term commitment from the EU/scientific community.

- The readability of the paper is limited due to a large use of abbreviations, a large focus on political phrases, enumerations and repetitions.

Reply: We have tried to reduce abbreviations whenever possible and as well as repetition in the text.

- I would appreciate a list of HES measures in a table with indicated what the status of standardization is.

Reply: Something about this was already under section Guidelines and standardized protocols. There is already a list of measurements for which EHES provides standardized methods and
examples of some additional measurements in national HESs which are not covered by current EHES standards. A reference to a recent publication with more information about included measurements in national HESs has been added as well as information that the EHES website has a list of some other internationally approved standardized methods.

- The maps of Europe are attractive, but maybe too much? (and: are you sure these figures are complete, maybe there were much more local initiatives …) What was included in those early HES? (to give an idea of development).

  Reply: The presented maps provide information about national HESs as stated in the figure headings. Information is obtained from the EHES network, covering all EU Member States as described in the new Methods section of the paper. We are aware that many countries have conducted more local or disease specific HESs which are not illustrated in our maps, which represent national HESs. In the revised version, we have combined maps from Figure 1 and Figure 2 into one figure.

  Earlier national HESs had a focus on CVD risk factors. The same measurements are still included nowadays but also new measurements such as functional capacity are often included. A few sentences about this have been added to the section ‘National HESs’ and a link to a recent publication providing more details about contents of national HESs has been added to the text.

- Many times the EHES Pilot project is mentioned, sometimes referred to as ‘pilot project’ (is that the same?), is this project ongoing or finished?

  Reply: The EHES Pilot Project was conducted in 2009-2012. After that, work has been continued as EHES. We have gone through the text and tried to clarify this throughout the text.
- The results of the questionnaire on the relevance of EHES should not be presented by %, it is not acceptable to do that with 17 responders. One solution is to present the arguments in fig 3 in order of usefulness (remark: I could not see the differences in grey shading).

Reply: We agree that figure 3 may have required some better format of presentation and proposed ranking by usefulness was a good suggestion. We have modified the figure accordingly and hope that readability is better now.

- The text should be checked for typo's.

Reply: The text has been read through by a native English speaker and typos have been corrected.

- The examples of uses of HES data are nice.

Reply: Thank you.

- I miss a discussion of limitations, challenges and a perspective on innovations.

Reply: Some limitations, challenges and perspectives have been added to the discussion.