

An Evaluation of Water Backpack (PackH₂O) Utilization in Kenya

A Research Report

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Abstract

Water is essential for sustainable development. However, there exist great inequalities in distribution and access to safe drinking water. Of the 748 million who do not have access to safe drinking water, 37% of the people live in Sub-Saharan Africa. In developing countries, it is reported that as much as 80% of the illnesses are linked to poor water and sanitation conditions. Consequently, an estimated 443 million school days are lost annually due to water-related illnesses. In Kenya, 43% of the people do not have access to clean water. To fetch water, some communities are sometimes required to walk long distances. Incidentally, 64% of the households rely on women to get the family's water when there is no water source at home in most cases using a jerry can. Weighing an estimated 40 lbs (18 kgs) when full, the jerry can has been associated with musculoskeletal pains especially in women who have to walk long distances. The water backpack has been designed as a suitable alternative to jerry cans. The backpack, developed by Greif Inc., has been described as the ergonomically correct way to carry and store water. In the last four (4) years, thousands of water backpacks have been distributed to several needy counties in Kenya.

This study was conducted to assess the proper utilization of the backpack in Embu, Machakos, Kilifi (Watamu) & Kiambu (Limuru) counties of Kenya. The study participants consisted of 403 people selected randomly from a population of those who had received the donation of a water backpack from Partners for Care, an NGO in Kenya. Observation and structured questionnaires were used to collect data. Data was analyzed and descriptive statistics used to present the data.

From the study, it was observed that on average 86% of all study participants in the four (4) counties demonstrated proper usage of the water backpack. In addition, over 97% of the participants reported to be cleaning the water backpack liner using wiping and sun drying methods. On the other hand, over 91% of all the respondents reported that they treat their water using boiling (33%), water guard (44%), and a combination of water guard & PuR (57%). In Machakos & Kilifi County, over 98% of the respondents

reported to have experienced back and neck pains that they associate with the use of jerry cans prior to use of the backpacks. Of these, over 67% reported a marked reduction of pain since they started using the water backpack. In conclusion, there is strong evidence that the water backpacks are used correctly in Kenya and have superior benefits compared to the jerry cans.

Key words: Machakos county, Kilifi county, Kiambu county, Embu county, water treatment, musculoskeletal pains

Introduction

Water is life and it is at the core of any development. It is a finite resource under a growing pressure of demand. According to United Nations Water Development Report 2015 (WWAP, 2015), 748 million people today still do not have access to an improved source of drinking water. This situation is bound to get worse since the demand for water in manufacturing is expected to increase by 400 per cent between 2000 and 2050 globally. In Africa, only 5% of the Africa's potential water resources are developed. There are a myriad of challenges with access to water in Africa as articulated at the 9th African Union General Assembly of the African Ministers Council of Water (AMCOW) in 2014. These includes; water infrastructure deficit, protection of the sanctity of the water sources & resources, water governance and management systems, water supply and distribution, financing and a lack of knowledge and water information (WWAP, 2015). For instance, compared to North America's average per capita water storage of 6,000 m³, Africa has measly average per capita water storage of 200 m³. Poor water and sanitation facilities in Africa have resulted in waterborne illnesses. For instance, diarrhea is the third biggest killer of children under five in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In Kenya, 43% of the population has no access to clean water (Marshall, 2011). The water scarcity in Kenya has been attributed to global warming (leading to years of recurrent droughts), challenges with water management, low investment in the water sector, contamination of available water resources and an increase in demand for water due to the population growth and industrialization. Some communities in water-stressed regions are forced to migrate when there is drought in order to find water. Migration has led to conflict. It also leads to school-going children dropping out of school affecting their education (Marshall, 2011). On the other hand, in the rural areas of Kenya, communities tend to settle within proximity of water sources. Kenya's rural population has a much lower access rate to clean water at 49% as compared to their urban counterparts at 85%. However, access to safe water by the urban poor is as low as 20% (Moraa *et al.*, 2012). The devolved system of governance is expected to reverse this trend. It is therefore common to find that the only available water sources in rural areas

are a distance away. To access water for daily use therefore, members of these communities have to trek long distances. It is mostly women and school going girls who bear the responsibility of fetching water.

For a long time, the ubiquitous water transportation and storage container in Africa has been the twenty (20) liter jerry cans. The jerry can is fraught with several challenges. One, it is extremely difficult to clean the inside of the jerry can and therefore there is a likelihood that this results in an accumulation of grime, a possible breeding ground of disease causing microorganisms. Secondly, most of the jerry cans are sourced from chemical industries. Some of the chemical residues persist in the cans and may not be removed by a simple wash. Users of these jerry cans therefore stand the risk of ingesting harmful compounds that may percolate slowly from these cans. On the other hand, these jerry cans are hard and when filled with 20 liters may hurt the user especially if travelling for a long distance. Anecdotal reports indicate that long usage of the jerry cans can result in back pain and severe discomfort. Some innovations have been developed to assuage the challenges of the jerry cans. For example the WaterWheel, a 50-liter water transportation and storage container that double up as a wheel is rolled by the user hence easing the burden of carrying water on the back or head. The WaterWheel is proposed to retail at \$ 30 each, a cost that is already too high. In addition, it is challenging to use this contraption in steep terrain. During the wet season, it may be difficult and risky to use it.

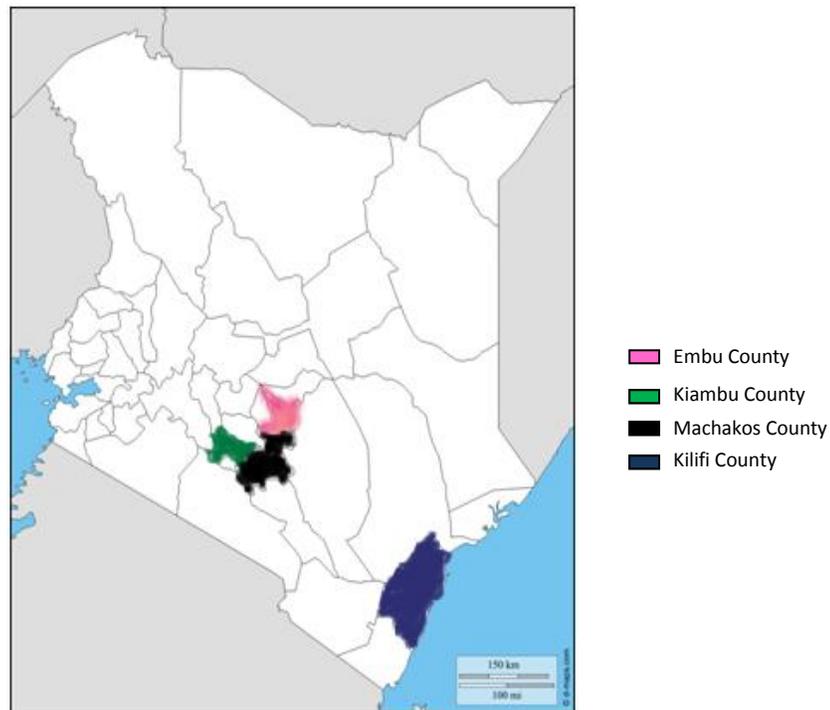
The packH₂O, a water backpack developed by Greif, is another innovation designed to ease the burden of carrying household water from access point to home. It was designed to imitate a standard backpack and has a 20 liter water carrying capacity. It contains a removable plastic liner that, after use, is easily cleaned and can be sanitized with exposure to sunlight. It also comes with a spout for dispensing water and a puncture-resistant outer shell. Since the backpack is light weight and collapsible, it has been found to be easy to store and transport. The water backpack was first used in Haiti after the earthquake. Since 2013, the pack has been introduced in Kenya through Partners for Care (PFC), a non-governmental organization (NGO). The backpacks were given as a donation and the users were taken through a short training session that highlighted the proper utilization of the pack, treatment of water and cleaning procedure. This study was therefore carried out to determine the utilization of the water backpack as an alternative water transportation and storage devise.

Materials and Methods

Study design, area and population

An evaluation study was adopted in Embu, Machakos, Kilifi and Kiambu counties of Kenya to determine the extent of proper use of the water backpack. The study was carried out on October and November, 2015. The study was carried out in Kiambu County, Machakos County, Watamu in Kilifi County and Limuru in Kiambu County. The population distribution in Embu, Machakos, Kiambu and Kilifi Counties are 543,221, 1,099,000, 1,623,000 and 1,110,000 persons, respectively. According to the 2013 County report by Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 63% of residents in Machakos County (KNBS & SID, 2013a) rely on unimproved sources of water compared to 36% in Kilifi County (KNBS & SID, 2013b), 25% in Kiambu County (KNBS & SID, 2013c) and 51% in Embu County (KNBS & SID, 2013d).

Map of Kenya showing the counties where this study was carried out



Sample Size Determination

The minimum sample size n was determined using the following formula,

$$x = Z(c/100)^2 r(100-r)$$

$$n = N x / ((N-1)E^2 + x)$$

where N is the population size, r is the fraction of responses that you are interested in, and $Z(c/100)$ is the critical value for the confidence level c , 1.96 at 95% confidence level (<http://www.raosoft.com/samplesize.html>).

Data Collection Techniques

Data was collected using structured questionnaires which were administered by research assistants as well as by observation.

Data Handling and Analysis

Microsoft excel was used to generate histograms and tables and R statistical package was used for further inferential statistical analysis and generation of correlograms.

Results & Discussion

Water Backpacks Distributed in the Study Area

The total number of households in the four study areas was approximately 730,000. Between 2012-2014, a total number of 10,680 water backpacks were distributed to Embu (3,000 packs, Aug. 2014), Kiambu (Limuru area) (4,100 packs, Dec. 2012 - Mar. 2013), Machakos (2,080 packs, Mar. 2013) and Kilifi (Watamu area) (1,500 packs, Sept. 2014). Each household received 1 water backpack. All the recipients were trained on how to use the water backpack. In addition, they were trained on how to treat the water, clean the water backpack and the sterilization procedures for the liner.



Photo 1: Staff from Partners for Care (PFC) conducting training on the use of the water backpack at Ishiara village, Machakos County. Photo courtesy of PFC.

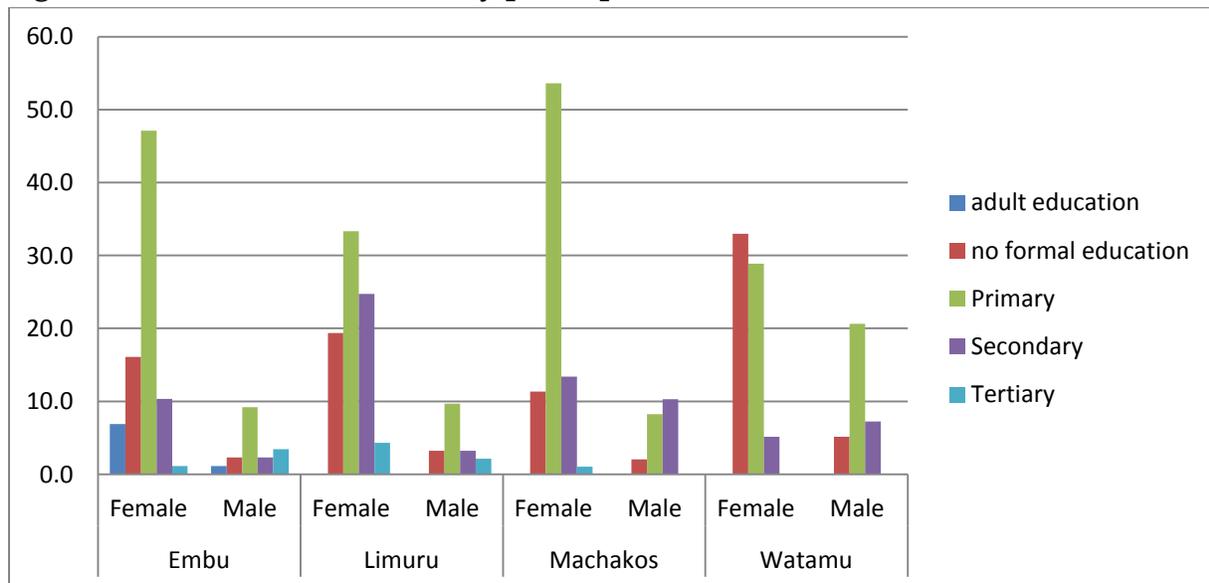


Photo 2: Staff from Partners for Care (PFC) conducting a training on the correct use of the water backpack at Ndeiya Health Center, Kiambu County. Photo courtesy of PFC.

Socio-demographic characteristics

A total of 403 participants (Embu, 100; Kiambu, 102; Machakos, 101 and Kilifi, 100) took part in the study. Majority of the participants, 66%, were aged 20-50 years, 25% were aged between 51-70 years while only 2% were below 20 years old. Of the total participants, 308 (76%) were females with age ranging from 15 to 105 years (mean age 43 years) and 95 (24%) were males, aged between 13 to 100 years (mean age 44 yrs). Majority of the homesteads (54%) had between 5-10 family members in the four study areas. Kilifi County however had 20% homesteads with between 11-30 family members and an average homestead of 8 members. The gender ratio varied with 80% women in Embu County, 78% women in Machakos County, 66% women in Kilifi County and 80% women in Kiambu County. Figure 1 shows educational characteristics of the study participants. The educational background of the study participants varied, ranging from illiterate to tertiary education. The participants with no formal education were as follows; 17% in Embu County, 13% in Machakos County, 37% in Kilifi County and 20% in Kiambu County. Half the participants had a primary level of education while 22% had secondary and tertiary level of education.

Fig 1: Education level of the study participants



Water sources

In this study, the source of water is important since the water backpacks are meant to improve transportation of water as well as to act as a storage facility. In Embu County, 58% of the respondents reported piped water as their source of water for domestic use while 26% respondents fetched their water from the river. In Machakos County, 88% of the respondents relied solely on water from the river and only 9% had piped water and water reservoir tanks as their source of water for domestic use. In Kilifi County on the other hand, 92% of the respondents obtained their water from water tanks, borehole or piped sources. The situation in Kiambu County, was close to that of Embu County since 78% of the participants reported to rely on piped water as the source of water for their domestic use while 14% collected water from water reservoir tanks within their compounds. It is worth noting that piped water generally referred to public taps.

Water transportation

In Embu County, 63% of the respondents used jerry cans and buckets to fetch water while 35% of the respondents used water backpack together with jerry cans to fetch water. In Machakos County, 87% of the respondents used water backpacks together with jerry cans and buckets to fetch water. Only 13% of the respondents relied on jerry cans and buckets to fetch water. In Kilifi County, 91% of the respondents used water backpacks together with jerry cans and buckets to fetch water. Kiambu County had half the respondents using the water backpacks together with jerry cans and buckets to fetch water. It was noteworthy that in Machakos County, those who used the water backpack to transport water significantly, $P 0.037$, treated their water. In Kilifi County, it was noted that use of water backpack to transport water significantly, $P 0.003$, depended on the family size with increase in family size resulting to less usage of the backpack in water transportation (see figure 2). This can be attributed to the use of the backpack for storage especially in large households. It was also noted that there was a tendency to use the backpack together with other water carrying containers.

Water storage

On the question of water storage, 84% of the respondents in Embu county stored water using the water backpack together with plastic jerry cans, buckets and plastic storage water tanks. On the other hand, 60% of the respondents from Machakos County used the water backpack exclusively for water storage purposes while 31% used the water backpack together with jerry cans and water tank. In Kilifi County, 92% respondents used the water backpack together with jerry cans, buckets and water tanks to store their water. In Kiambu County, an overwhelming 99% of the respondents used the water backpack together with jerry cans, buckets and water tanks. Of this number, 37% of the

respondents use the water backpack exclusively to store water. Notably, there was a significant correlation that those who used the water backpack to transport water also used it for its storage purposes in Kiambu County ($P = 0.029$), and Machakos County ($P = 0.167$). It is apparent that one water backpack per household was less than sufficient to address the water storage requirements of households with an average six members.

Water collection distance

In Machakos County, 56% of the respondents took more than two hours to make a round trip to the water source. This is almost twice the number of respondents from Embu County (32%) who take more than two hours to fetch water and compares closely to the percentage of respondents from Kilifi County (59%). Kiambu County had the least percentage of respondents (8%) who took at least two hours to fetch water. In Embu County, the findings indicate a high significant relationship between water collection distance and reported pain ($P = 0.00000376$, Correlation coefficient = 0.4499788) which was reported to have reduced significantly following the introduction of the water backpack ($P = 0.0000856$, Correlation coefficient = 0.39998588) (see figure 2).

Frequency of water collection

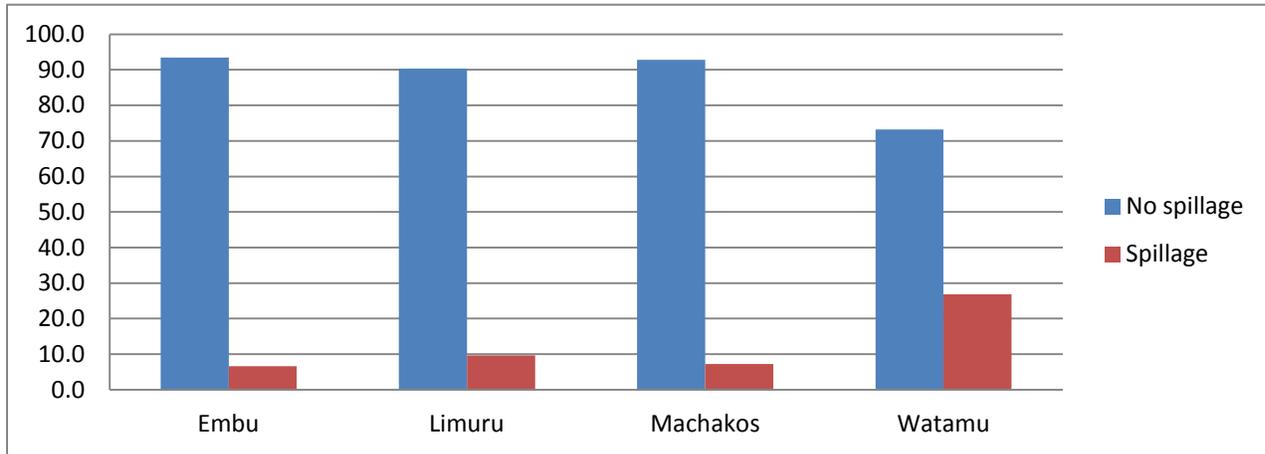
Over 95% of respondents from Machakos, Kiambu & Kilifi County fetch water daily, as do 87% respondents from Embu County. 88% of the respondents from Machakos County fetch water more than twice daily as do 74% respondents from Kilifi County, 84% respondents from Embu County and 89% respondents from Limuru County. Notably, use of the backpack to carry water in Embu County correlated significantly with increased daily water collection frequency possibly due to the excitement of using the pack ($P = 0.000141$). Interestingly, it was noted that those who used the water backpack to store water showed a significant reduction in water collection frequency ($P = 0.0341$, Correlation coefficient = -0.21536674) possibly because the users preferred to use the backpack in water collection.

Incidents of water spillage from the water backpack

This study reported very few cases of water spills in respondents using the water backpacks. For instance, less than 10% respondents from Machakos, Embu and Kiambu Counties reported cases of water spills (see figure 3). However, 28% of the respondents from Kilifi County reported cases of water spillage. It was noted that this was due to poor folding technique and overfilling the water backpack. In Kilifi County spillage was most significantly associated with improper use ($P < 0.000001$, Correlation coefficient = 0.664703012). Considering that Kilifi had over 37% illiteracy level, a further training in

proper use of the backpack is recommended in the area. There was no reported case of water spills due to torn water backpacks.

Fig 3: Incidents of water spillage from the water backpacks



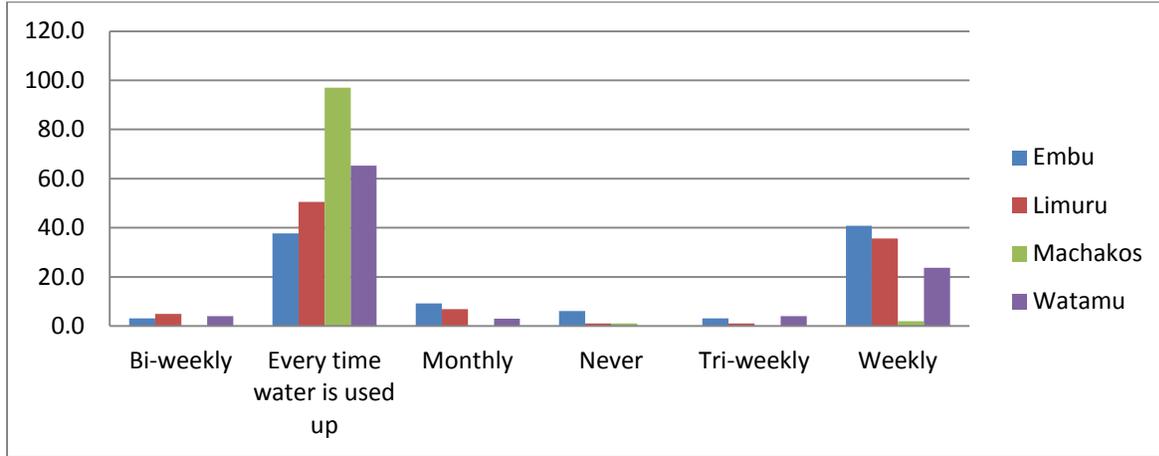
Observation of the proper use of the water backpack

It was observed that on average 86% of all study participants demonstrated proper use of the water backpack with respondents from Machakos County demonstrating the lowest percentage (72%) and Kiambu County demonstrating the highest percentage (98%). There is a noticeable high acceptance and proper use of the water backpack by the community. During the study, other than to transport and store water, the data collectors did not observe any other undesirable use of the backpack in the study region.

Cleaning of the water backpack liner

From the study, over 97% of the participants reported to be cleaning the water pack liner. The frequency was either every time water is used up, weekly, bi-weekly or monthly. Notably, 62% of all participants cleaned the liner every time the water was used up and only 2% of the respondents, mostly from Embu County, reported to have never cleaned up the liner (see figure 4). About 68% of the respondents used both wiping and sun drying methods to clean the liner. A small number of the respondents used either wiping (24%, mostly in Kiambu County) or sun-drying (6%, mostly in Embu County) alone to clean the water backpack liners. Interestingly, there was a significant, correlation between use of backpack to carry water in Kiambu County and failure to clean its liner ($P= 0.006$).

Fig 4: Water backpack liner cleaning frequency



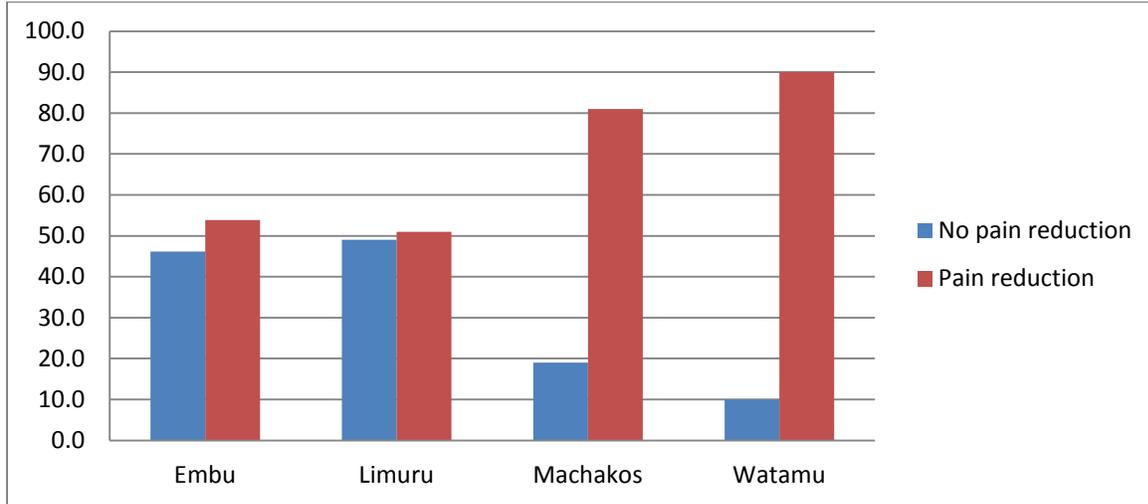
Water treatment methods

Over 91% of the respondents in the four Counties treat their water. The treatment methods used across the Counties were boiling (33%), water guard (44%), a combination of water guard and PuR (57%) and filtration (3%). Embu and Limuru Counties preferred boiling treatment method at 44% and 59%, respectively. Machakos County overwhelmingly used the water guard at 86% whereas in Kilifi County, water guard (53%) and a combination of water guard and PuR (53%) was preferred. Those who did not treat had different reasons for not doing it. Some believed that the piped water was safe (Embu & Limuru County), did not have money, or did not have time. It was noted that use of the water backpack in Embu County & Kiambu County led to a significant increase in use of water treatment methods with (P = 0.013 and 0.040, respectively).

Back and neck pains

When asked whether the respondents have experienced back and neck pains while using the jerry cans, 77% of all the respondents answered yes. In Machakos & Kilifi County, over 98% of the respondents have experienced back and neck pains that they associate with the use of jerry cans. The percentage was slightly lower in Embu (59%) and Kiambu (54%) Counties. Asked if there has been a reduction of pain since they started using the water backpack, 67% of the respondents answered in the affirmative. 81% of these were from Machakos County, 90% from Kilifi County while only 49% and 51% of the respondents from Embu and Kiambu Counties respectively answered this question in the affirmative (see figure 5).

Fig 5: Rates of back and neck pain reduction after use of the water backpacks



Conclusion

There is overwhelming evidence that there is proper usage of the backpacks. It was also noted that the water backpack has resulted in creating of awareness on use of water treatment methods leading to safe drinking water in the study regions. This was clearly stated by many residents who noted a reduction in waterborne diseases since the introduction of the packs. We plan in a further study to verify this claim from the health facilities within the region. The significant reduction in musculoskeletal injury following the introduction of the packs means that the women fetching water using the backpacks are healthier and can engage in other socio-economic activities. In addition, it was observed that use of the backpack made fetching water a good and decent experience. There was overwhelming evidence that additional water backpacks are necessary in the region. Most of the households had an average of six members and this necessitated fetching more than 40 gallons of water daily. There was therefore a tendency of using jerry cans to ferry water and water backpacks to store water since each household was only given one backpack. Residents also suggested that large sized water backpacks be provided for the purpose of water storage.

Memorable quotes from the respondents

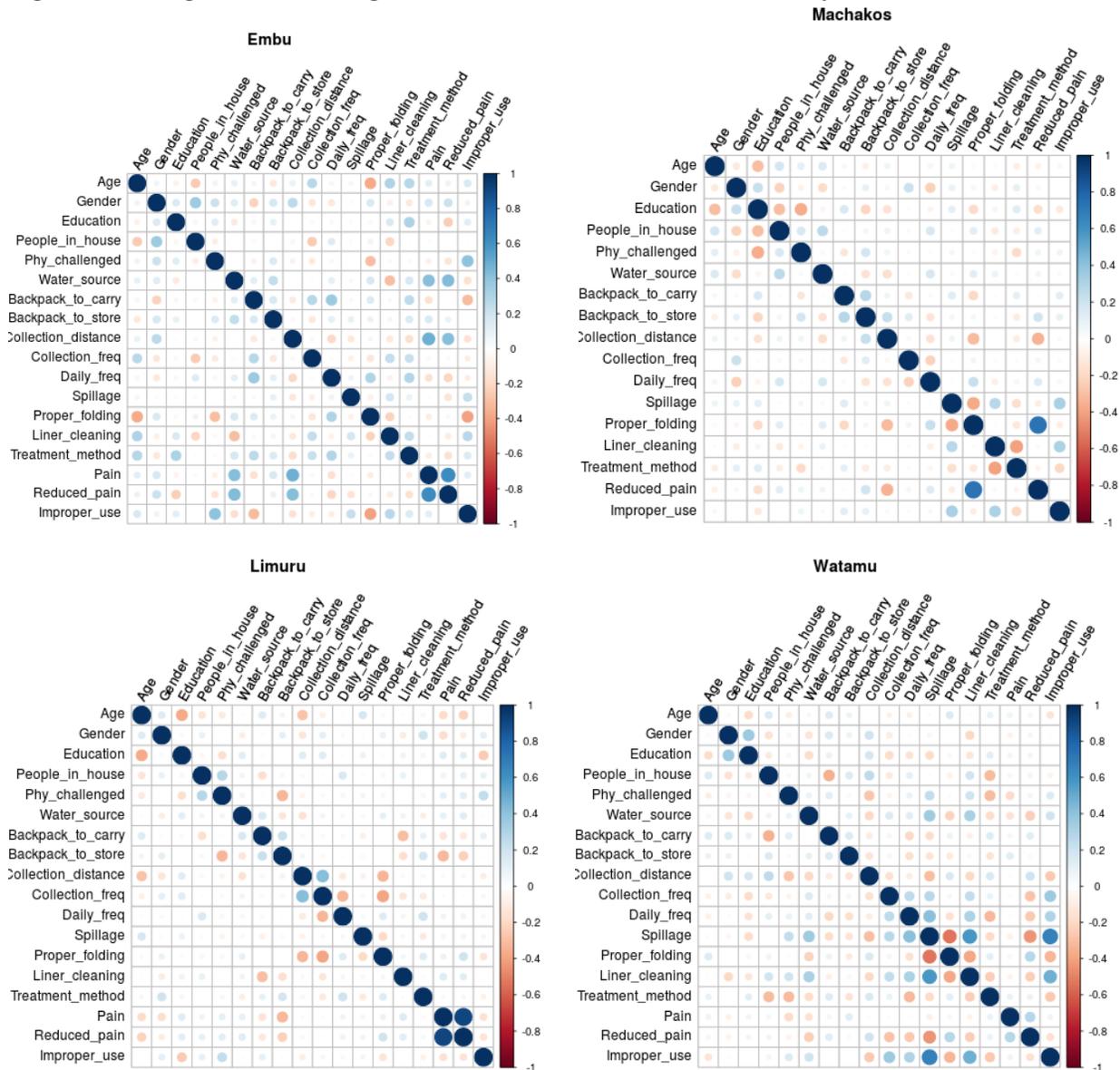
“Easy to carry! I am happy. Please, I would want more water backpacks”

“I am happy and this pack helps me to help my wife carry the pack. Thank you and God bless”

“Thank you for the water pack. It has prevented my children from getting waterborne diseases”

“My children used to be very sick with waterborne diseases, now it’s no more. I am thankful for the water backback”

Fig. 2 Correlograms showing different associations in the study



Positive correlation is represented by blue shading while negative correlation is represented by red. The level of correlation significance is represented by the size of the circle.

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