Reviewer’s report

Title: The epidemiology of hepatitis E virus in Africa

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Reviewer: Behzad Hajarizadeh

Reviewer’s report:

Jong-Hoon Kim and colleagues conducted a systematic review looking at various epidemiological aspects of HEV in Africa including prevalence, outbreaks, case fatality rates, etc. Conducting a comprehensive literature search is the strength of this study but there are some issues in design and implementation of the study raising major concerns. More details come as follow.

Major Compulsory Revisions:

1- Defining a clear formulized research question is one of the main characteristics of a good systematic review. The research question in this study, “investigating epidemiology of HEV in Africa”, is too broad for a systematic review. This broad title resulted in collecting a large amount of data which prevented authors to be able to analyse the data deeply enough. The results reported in the abstract contain only one sentence which is not clear enough and could not reflect the real findings of the study. It is mainly because the collected data is too large and too broad to be summarized in the abstract properly. Almost every subheading in the results section of the manuscript (e.g. prevalence, outbreaks, case fatality rates, etc) could be the subject of a systematic review independently.

2- Literature search was conducted up to October 2012 which is a bit old for a paper to be published in 2014.

3- It seems the authors did not do any quality assessment on the articles they collected during their literature search. It is an essential component of a systematic review, otherwise good quality and bad quality data mix up in data analysis affecting the validity of the reported findings.

4- Data on prevalence of HCV and hepatitis cases attributed to HEV come from heterogeneous populations. A wide range of 0 to 84% was reported as the prevalence of HEV in different countries but given the heterogeneous populations, it is not clear how much of this variance can be explained by study population and how much could be attributed to different epidemiology in different countries. Moreover, if they had included erogenous study populations they would have been able to do more profound analysis on collected data. For example, if they had included data of only general population, they would have been able to do analysis of age-specific prevalence, gender-specific prevalence, prevalence in rural and urban areas, etc.

Minor Essential Revisions:
5- The second paragraph of introduction is not directly relevant to the study.
6- Selection and methods: “We qualitatively synthesized information on HEV epidemiology in Africa from 152 articles”. This sentence is not clear.

**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