Reviewer’s report

Title: Overcoming Phase I Delays: The Critical Component of Obstetric Fistula Prevention Programs in Resource-Poor Countries

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Reviewer: Saifuddin Ahmed

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Overcoming Phase I Delays: The Critical Component of Obstetric Fistula Prevention Programs in Resource-Poor Countries

This is an excellent paper in the form an anthropological treatise. Using Thaddeus and Maine’s “Three Delays” model, the paper critically examines through the lens of an anthropologist the causes and contexts of the “first delay” for seeking care for the problem of obstructed labor in resource-poor settings where obstetric fistula is still prevalent. Social, cultural and religious barriers were illustrated with examples and annotations.

I have the following the suggestions to improve clarity in some areas:

1. In “What is to be done?” section, the texts may be divided into three headings: cultural beliefs, religious faith, and knowledge gaps.
2. Elaborate on the meaning of “perception” on p. 11 (“In the first phase of delay, perception is everything.”). Perception of what : perception of risk/perception of need?
3. Please elaborate the sentence, “Their concerns may lie more with metaphysics than with physics proper.” (p. 12): 
4. Expand to explain the differences between “false” labor (pain) and “true” labor (p.13)
5. On page 28 it was mentioned, “Community education and development can be enhanced by thoughtfully structured programs that increase the availability of skilled midwifery care at the local level.” Increasing the availability of skilled birth attendants by through an intervention program by itself not necessarily may increase community awareness. Specific, targeted BCC program may be needed to change behavior.

One last point I want to emphasize. Trust, including hospital abuse, is an issue (analogous in the US contexts often this relates to minority population’s less trust in the health care system, especially after the Tuskegee trial) which is completely ignored in the maternal health care literature from developing countries. This paper emphasizes significantly on this issue and constitutes an important contribution to the limited literature on this area.

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 do not have conflict of interest.