Reviewer’s report

Title: Reasons rural Laotians choose home deliveries over delivery at health facilities: a qualitative study

Version: 1 Date: 7 April 2012

Reviewer: Juliet Bedford

Reviewer’s report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review the manuscript ‘Reasons rural Laotians choose home deliveries over delivery at health facilities: a qualitative study’. The paper contains interesting information about the preferences of rural Laotians to give birth at home, and benefits from the inclusion of quotations. It will certainly be of interest to the journal’s readership – but would benefit from some revisions to the structure of the text so that the material is presented in a clearer, more ordered way.

MINOR ESSENTIAL REVISIONS:

General comments

• All abbreviations should be written in full the first time they are used:
Lao PDR needs to be written in full for an international readership, both in the Abstract and the first time it is stated in the full text (Background, p.3 line 1)
Abstract – MMR, line 3 of Conclusion
Background, p.3 line 4 – Total Fertility Rate (TFR)
Background, p.4 line 4 – ANC services

• Abbreviations need only be introduced once, there is no need to repeat (eg. p.8, first line of Data Collection, you have already explained FDGs and IDIs).

• There are some idiosyncrasies in the English that could be tightened up (e.g. p.21, line 3 ‘previous research on rural birthing in the world’)

• The manuscript should be proof read and typos corrected:
p.4 line 16, 51.2% (not 51,2% as currently written)
p.11 first quote is missing quotation marks at the end
p.11 line 9, help my wife during labour by massage (not message)
p.12, line 15, drag my family to visit me [at?] the hospitals

• The references should be cited at the end of the first sentence to which they are related so the reader clearly knows where your information is coming from.

Terminology

• p. 6 line 15 – the term animist has specific socio-cultural connotations. Is the
use of this term accurate here? There should be consistent usage of terms, at the moment you write animist in the text but in Table 2, under Religion, write Spirit. Please amend appropriately.

• p.16 – please define the term ‘magic’ in relation to magic water.

Background

• p.3 lines 3/4 – To give the reader a sense of time, please include a date, rather than writing ‘during the 36 month period prior to this study…’ Suggest including the date of the study these figures were taken from.
• p.4 line 2, please reference the Lao PDR Safe Motherhood Program at the end of the sentence
• p.4 line 4, please reference the 2005 National Reproductive Health Survey at the end of the sentence
• p4. line 18, you have written ‘A survey in 2007 among all women in Lao PDR…’ this suggests this is a different survey from the National Reproductive Health Survey you are referring to in the rest of the paragraph, and is confusing.
• P4. line 21, suggest you replace ‘Studies from Nepal and Indonesia’ with studies in other contexts or studies from other areas, as many studies have shown that place of delivery is often decided by family members, not only in Nepal and Indonesia.
• p.5 line 3, please be specific about which 2007 survey you are adding depth to, please provide a reference here.

Participants / Data collection / Data analysis

These three sections would benefit from re-ordering the material to make it clearer for the reader.

Participants

• This section needs to also include recruitment details.

How were the women identified and contacted?

Where did their medical history come from?

How was it decided who would be in the focus groups and who would be interviewed? Did participants overlap between the two?

Were the mothers and husbands of participants in the focus groups also recruited?

• State the number of FGDs held, the number of participants and the number IDIs in this section.

• Some of these details are currently presented in the Data Collection section, but need to be moved up to participants and recruitment.

• The characteristics of the participants, both the description in the text and the two tables should be moved to the results section. Additional details to include, if
possible, would be the age that participants married (you mention elsewhere the impact of early marriages).

Data collection

• p.8, final 5 lines, this description of the recruitment process should be moved up into the preceding section on participants.
• p.8, penultimate line, please clarify which cadre helped recruit the women.
• p.9 line 1, please give more methodological detail about the semi-structured interview guide, who devised this, based on what, perhaps give some examples of questions asked.
• p9 first paragraph, please be consistent with your terminology, it is unclear what the difference is between the moderator and the investigator and how they relate to the four interviewers and three field assistants.

• p9 second paragraph, please give more methodological detail about the interview questions – were these related to the FGD questions, based on the same semi-structured guide?
• The reader should be told in this section that both the FGDs and interviews were recorded and transcribed and that the Lao language was used. Suggest moving this up from the Data Analysis section.

Results

• If results are being presented in box format, they should follow the order of results presented in the text.
• Have you presented the results according to the themes identified by the content analysis? If so, it may help structure the results section if each theme was clearly discussed in turn.
• If sub-headings are being used, then more need to be incorporated, because currently the second sub-heading, challenges to giving birth at a health facility: costs and transport, covers many issues beyond cost and transport.

Suggest, new sub-headings:
• p.13 line 15, Position of delivery and procedures
• p.14 line 18 Previous negative experiences
• p.15 line 10 Presence of male birth attendants
• p.16 – was any explanation offered about traditional practices, eg. why does putting eggs on the abdomen ease delivery?
• It would be helpful if all the information concerning TBAs could be gathered together, potentially under a specific heading.

Discussion

• p.19 line 9, the study does not really deal with decision-making processes in
depth. It would be interesting to link decision-making processes with events – did the family decide ahead of time where the woman would give birth? What happened during labour if there was a complication – how was the decision made that home was no longer an option and that care must be sought from a health facility? Ignore if this data was not gathered.

- p.19 line 12, reference 14 refers to Indonesia not Nepal.
- p.19 line 14, is the decision-making around healthcare for malaria specific to Lao PDR or other countries? Similarly, p.20 references 26 and 29, please state that these studies are in other countries.
- p.19 lines 17-19, this sentence is very unclear, please re-write.
- p.20 line 4 – the sentence ‘one that will take considerable time, money and political will to solve’, is out of place here. It is an important point, but should be leading a paragraph on how to solve some of the barriers to health seeking women face. Suggest adding in a paragraph on this, which would link to your concluding points about the research being used by policy makers, planners etc.
- p.21, line 13, please reference the National Reproductive Health Survey when you first mention it, rather than several sentences later at the end of the paragraph.
- p.21 line 14, please be more specific and write since 2006, rather than ‘in the last five years’.

Limitations

Did you encounter other limitations, concerning the qualitative methodology? Willingness of participants to discuss experiences openly with researchers, issues of socially desirable answers etc? If so, please describe the actions that were taken to limit these issues.

Conclusion

Suggest deleting the first two lines of the conclusion, so it starts, 'This study elucidates factors that favour home birth against costly, inconvenient……'

If you can make clearer the study’s potential to be operationalised (how health facility childbirth services could better meet the needs and wishes of rural women, how demand for health facility attendance could be generated) that would be both very interesting and important. As it stands, this study provides an evidence base about why women choose to give birth at home, but the findings don’t suggest specific ways that information about safe-motherhood should be formulated in order to reach women and their families (p.22/23). The conclusion would be strengthened by focusing on what the study illustrates well, the perceptions women and their families have about home deliveries in contrast to health facility deliveries.

References
• 7 and 8 – please write in full MoH as the Ministry of Health, Lao PDR
• 12 – the first author’s name is Ritchie (not Rithchie)

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.