Reviewer's report

Title: Why do women prefer home births in Ethiopia?

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Reviewer: Jossy van den Boogaard

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This is a well written paper based on the results of a properly designed study that is interesting to everyone involved in international maternal health care. It was a pleasure to read!

However, I do have a few comments to be addressed by the authors.

- Major Compulsory Revisions:
  1. The authors indicate that their study has been conducted in an area where “key challenges related to transportation and availability of obstetric services were addressed by an ongoing project.” In the methods section, this ongoing project is briefly described: “For example, a renovated health center with an experienced obstetrician-gynecologist and an ambulance provided 24 hour service either free or at minimal charge…”.

  In my opinion, this “ongoing project” deserves a more extensive explanation. If this project concerned ‘only’ one renovated health center with obstetrician and one ambulance for a population of more than 1,2 million, then I can understand that still 22% of women did not deliver in a health facility because of high costs and 8% because of distance. In this case, however, I would not state that “physical and financial access to a health facility have been addressed to a GREAT extent” (see first line of the Discussion).

  If the “ongoing project” covered much more than one renovated health center and one ambulance, a more detailed description of the project and an explanation of why a substantial proportion of women still indicated costs and distance as reasons for not delivering in a health care facility, would be needed.

  2. It would be helpful to know what kind of health professionals are working in the 11 health centers, 126 health posts and 13 private clinics in the research area. Are these nurses, midwives, doctors, assistants? In other words, how skilled are the health professionals in these health facilities in reality?

  3. The authors do not differentiate between trained and untrained Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) (with exception of the discussion, where trained TBAs are briefly mentioned). From Table 3, I understand that this division has nevertheless been made in the study. In addition, Table 3 includes “Health Extension Workers” (HEW) about whom I did not read in the text (again, with exception of a short paragraph in the discussion).

  Are these HEW and trained TBAs considered as “skilled birth attendants” by the
authors? And did the authors find particular preferences for trained TBAs or HEW as compared to untrained TBAs? It would be interesting if the authors could elaborate a little more on this issue.

4. In the results section, the two paragraphs under “[Insert Table 2 here]” seem to contain overlapping information. For example, in the first paragraph it is stated that “women with at least secondary education were more likely to deliver in an institution”, and in the second paragraph: “those with a higher level of education were more likely to assisted by trained health professionals”. This asks for clarification. In addition, I would more clearly indicate that all these findings were non-significant (as can be concluded from the Table, but is not very clear in the text).

- Minor Essential Revisions
There are a few minor problems in language/spelling. For example:
1. Results section, under “Maternity service utilization”: “A total 0f…”
2. And in the next line (results section, under “Maternity service utilization”): there should be a comma after “(75%)”.
3. Under “Perceptions of TBAs as culturally acceptable and competent community health workers”, sixth line under the first quotation: one of the words “indicate” and “suggest” should be removed.
4. In the abstract, second line of the “Background”, I would state: “However, IN MANY DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, very few mothers make at least one antenatal visit and even less receive delivery care from skilled professionals.”

- Discretionary Revisions
None.

**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 declare that I have no competing interests.