Reviewer's report

Title: Assessing the Unmet Obstetric Need and of the accessibility of Emergency Obstetric Care in Tanga Region, Tanzania

Version: 1 Date: 13 November 2006
Reviewer: Siri Vangen

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General
Through several decades large efforts and major investments have been laid down to build up mother and child health care in the poor countries of the world. Even though some results of these efforts have been observed in terms of reduction in maternal mortality rates we are still waiting for a substantial improvement in maternal mortality rates rate in poor areas of the world. The last step in reaching the aim of maternal mortality reduction is still missing namely increasing the access to high quality emergency obstetric care services for all and particularly for poor uneducated women in rural areas.

1. Quantification of the unmet obstetric needs in poor countries is therefore an important research issue. The results from some studies performed in poor countries about the issue have already been published, but the topic need further attention and is not previously addressed in the Tanga region of Tanzania. The issue of unmet obstetric needs and quantifications of such unmet needs are important to elaborate effective strategies to increase the quality of existing services and to improve the access to such services also for poor, uneducated women living in rural areas.

The objective of the current article was to quantify the deficit in lifesaving obstetric interventions in the Tanga region in Tanzania. Furthermore the authors aimed at assessing urban/rural differences and linking obstetric interventions to outcomes and evaluating the feasibility of the UON approach for health service management at district levels. Quantifying the deficit of lifesaving obstetric interventions, assessing urban/rural differences and linking obstetric interventions to outcomes are relevant and well defined questions, which are adequately supported by the data. The UON concept of unmet obstetric care to measure deficits in access to emergency obstetric care as such has not been scientifically evaluated in the current study.

2. The method is well described and sufficient details are provided to replicate the study. An important precondition inherent in the methodology was the definition of a threshold of a minimum rate of major obstetric interventions to 2% of all births. The authors’ state that based on literature, a Tanzanian pilot study, and expert advice, the Tanzanian UON team decided to set this threshold at 2% of all deliveries. Furthermore the lower limit of caesarean section recommended by the WHO is 5%. It would help the reader if the rational behind this definition could be better described. Why accurately 2% in Tanzania and not 1% or 1.6% as used elsewhere?

3. The data seem sound and well controlled as the number of caesarean sections as the number of caesarean sections, the main major obstetric intervention, was crosschecked with data from the official health information system. Thus it was possible to give an impression of data validity.

4. The manuscript adheres to relevant standards of data deposition and reporting. EPI-Info 2000 was used for data processing and analyses.

5. The discussion and conclusion is adequately supported by the data. However, the discussion could benefit from some reorganisations.

6. The abstract is Ok. The title could be shortened.

7. The article would benefit from language revision.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
None
Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
Evaluating the feasibility of the UON approach for health service management at district levels is pointed out as one of the research aims of the study. Evaluations in terms of scientific research, however, are linked to specific research methods. The discussion do have a section about the authors opinion about the UON concept as a tool to quantify deficits in emergency obstetric care at a district level, but the concept as such has not been evaluated. Thus evaluating the feasibility of the UON approach for health service management at district levels should be removed as an objective of the study.

The references must be checked.

The current article addresses a very important and relevant topic. To secure that the article message is easily understood and distributed to a large audience a person skilled in English writing should revise it. In particular some sections of the discussion are difficult to read. The use of much shortening such as UON, ANC, AMI, MOI, HMIS, PMPTC, IEC further increase the problems of reading.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
Proposals for reorganisations of the text:

Methodology section
Page 8. This figure based upon historical data….. This issue has already been addressed on page 6. The comments on this issue are better presented jointly.

Page 8, second section. According to the above deliberations………this section should be removed to page 7 where urban rural distributions of the population are addressed.

Results section
Page 12. The first sentence under the section urban-rural differences is no results and should be removed to the discussion section

Discussion section
After presenting the main results of the study the main issue of the article should be discussed namely the deficits in emergency obstetric care and how these deficits can be overcome. This part of the discussion could be strengthened (see Ronsmans C, The Lancet 2006; 368: 1189-1200 and Mbaruku G Health Policy and Planning 1995; 10: 71-78)
The comparison of the results of the current study with the results from other studies could be broadened and the results from other studies could be presented in more detail. The role of antenatal care in preventing maternal morbidity and mortality is also essential, but could be removed further back in the discussion.

A better article title would be: Assessing the unmet need of emergency obstetric care in Tanga region, Tanzania.

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests