Reviewer’s report

Title: Prevalence and barriers to HIV testing among mothers at a tertiary care hospital in Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Version: 1 Date: 30 November 2009

Reviewer: Freddy Perez

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Prevalence and barriers to HIV testing among mothers at a tertiary care hospital in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Authors: Sasaki et al.

Importance of the study

Even though there is a need to improve coverage of PMTCT worldwide, this study and main results are not new as there have been various reports on barriers to HIV testing among pregnant women. Here below are comments and suggestions that need to be improved in the paper by section.

Overall comments

• There is a need to review English language grammar in the overall document.
• References: some are outdated and there is a use of documents, reports which are not accessible.
• Format: the document needs to have a review of the format. As example, there are sentences that are isolated (page 6)

Major Compulsory Revisions

Method:

• Recruitment: 600 women where recruited, there is no data on inclusion and exclusion criteria and reasons. There is a need to better describe the recruitment process undertaken (how/when). Based on this, how were women who were not tested for HIV identified. If this was at labour/delivery why wasn’t HIV testing in labour proposed?

• Questionnaire items: such as “experience of ANC” and partners involvement for HIV testing need to be defined.

Results:

• What happened with the 24% of women who did not experience HIV testing? Were reasons for not testing collected?

• There are parts of this section for which phrases have not been completed. This
section of the paper is not well written and needs formatting.

Discussion

• Suggestions to include partners in HIV counselling and testing, but what is lacking is “how”. The authors need to refer to recent literature on partner counselling and interventions to improve partner uptake (Katz, 2009; Desgrees-du-Lou, 2009).

• In the abstract and discussion, the authors state the need to improve quality counselling; however there is no data on this in the survey.

• In addition, Sasaki et al, suggest efficient utilization of available human resources, based on what? How has this been considered in this study?

• Comparison of results with other studies is done but the comparison of studies that are out-dated. As example, the author’s compare the up-take of HIV testing with the study by Cartoux et al (1998). To consider that in this study no PITC was applied at that time.

• An issue that the authors do not consider when discussing up-take of HIV testing by pregnant women is: do women who accept PITC understand the choice (Mugure et al, 2008).

• A major error in the paper is the statement that with PITC, HIV post-test counselling is eliminated.

• There is a lack of information on why ANC services are different in/out of PhnomPenh

Minor Essential Revisions

Method:

• It is not clear in the paper Why PMTCT is proposed in a reference hospital and not in health centres. Is it the role of referral hospitals?

• The questionnaire used for the survey was pre-tested. There is no information on the results of this pre-tested and what changes were necessary.

• Small pilot was carried out, what were the results? How did this help improve the study? This data is useful for the reader.

Results:

• What happened with the women who did not delivery at NMCHC?

• The statement: “the education level and occupation of partners where significantly related with “their experience” is not clear” (page 6).

• There is a need to define the variable “having visited ANC in Phnom Penh or not” (minimum one visit?).
Among mothers who got tested for HIV, “perfect score” was observed. Perfect score of what? (page 6). How was this calculated, what is the definition of this variable.

Discussion

- The authors suggest that the results “could” be linked to the introduction of PITC. A simple way is to compare periods with and without PITC (Chandisarewa, 2007).

- “PITC should not diminish benefits of VCT strategy”, need to develop this statement, not clear as it is.

- Limits of PITC not covered.

- No information on which are the licensed sites of testing. Need to define this.

- The authors highlight that 80% of deliveries in rural area are at home. It would have been useful that the authors give suggestions to improve cover of PMTCT in this setting. Which are these community based interventions that the authors mention?

References:

- The list of references contains out-dated references and documents not accessible and presentations are incomplete.

Freddy Perez

I have no conflict of interest.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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