Reviewer's report

Title: Beliefs and practices during pregnancy and childbirth in urban slums of Dhaka, Bangladesh

Version: 1 Date: 26 June 2012

Reviewer: zelee hill

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Major Compulsory Revisions
1. In the background explain why quantitative data collection in slum areas is required rather than relying on data from large scale surveys such as DHS. They could explain that these surveys do not allow disaggregation at the required level.

2. Please include a table of the main results (including confidence intervals) with all the main findings from the quantitative survey. This should include data on knowledge and perceptions of pregnancy, delivery and post-partum care. These are listed in the methods but not presented in the results. A table would make the results accessible in a single look.

3. On reading the qualitative results I was left with the feeling that this is a very surface level analysis and that a more detailed look at the data would reveal more in-depth and more useful findings.

4. It is unclear what the authors mean by post natal care. Is it a visit to a facility or a health worker coming to the house within 2 days of birth? In the PNC section the description included intra-partum care, food taboos etc.

5. Clear data on how the quantitative and qualitative findings compare to rural areas is needed. Actual levels of ANC and a more detailed description of key beliefs found in other papers is needed.

6. In the discussion rather than describe that other qualitative research suggests that CHWs can change practices report what impact CHWs have actually had. Many of the key CHW papers are report changes in behaviours such as percentage of facility deliveries.

7. The discussion has a strong focus on getting ANC visits to 4, the other findings around PNC, skilled attendants etc merit equal attentions.

8. In the discussion the section on social support appears to be references a more detailed paper from the formative research process for the Manoshi program. This should be made clear as it currently sounds as if these are two separate studies.

Minor Essential Revisions
1. The authors should remove all repetitions and edit to ensure the paper is more concise.
2. In the abstract state that the quantitative survey was a probability sample and give an indication of the sample size.

3. Make it clear in the abstract and methods that they are reporting findings from the formative research for the Manoshi project. Also clarify if the survey was part of the formative research or was a baseline survey. Reference the Manoshi formative research paper where appropriate.

4. In the background include something about the level of service provision in slum populations.

5. The results that are presented in the abstract and in the discussion about PNC being perceived as of little importance are not presented in the results section.

6. Add information in the methods relating to eligibility criteria- Does infant mean any woman with a child under 12 months was included in the survey? Did it matter whether they delivered before they migrated to the study area? Given 52% had lived in the slum for less than two years this may be common. If women who delivered pre-migration were included the results may not reflect behaviours in the slum.

7. Give more information on how beliefs and practices were explored qualitatively and a brief outline of the topics covered in the interviews.

8. Explain why the qualitative sample was stratified by currently pregnancy multi-gravida women and non-pregnant multi-granvidas. I could not understand the rational for this.

9. Explain how not wanting to share the pregnancy with community members is linked to not attending ANC 4 times? Most do attend ANC once so have already 'shared' the pregnancy with the clinic staff.

10. In the paper it sounds as if women do not see the importance of ANC at all yet most attend at least once. The reasons for initial attendance but then dropping out should be explored.

11. Explain the cultural preference for TBAs. This cultural preference is stated but the authors then focus on cost as a reason for using TBAs. To what does this cultural preference refer?

9. In the last paragraph of the PNC section clarify whether the data are qualitative or quantitative.

10. In the discussion few empirical data are presented on recommendations such as improving birth preparedness, including such data would strengthen the paper.

12. The conclusion that women need more education messages is not based on the results where it is not reported whether woman received educational messages. A more comprehensive behaviour change approach may be needed rather than just educational messages.

Discretionary Revisions:
1. Reduce the length of the background section on Manoshi.
2. Be consistent with decimal places.
3. Clarify how the findings of the formative research will be used to judge the effectiveness of the program. Is this by comparing baseline to an endline? If so be specific about this.
4. Add quotes relating to more than 1 ANC visit being unimportant and relying on land ladies for support.
5. Report who the advice about eating after delivery was usually from.
6. Explain the landlady role more- are these women who own large compounds and rent out single rooms?

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

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

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