Author's response to reviews

Title: Early impact of an integrated maternal, newborn, and child health program, Northern Nigeria, 2009 to 2011

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Margaret:

Thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to revise our manuscript. The comments from the reviewers were very helpful in sharpening our focus on the significance of our results beyond the implications for our program. We have changed the terminology from Midterm to Follow-up Survey, in keeping with this shift towards the broader implications. We hope that you will agree with us that the manuscript is now much improved. In the process of responding to the reviewers, we were also able to tighten up the text so that there is overall a better flow to the manuscript.

Here is how we responded to the comments of each reviewer.

Reviewer 1:

Title page: Done.

Methods:

- Added a separate section “Study Site” with additional information on the three states and the limited participation in the health system prior to launching the program.
- Intervention description: Added a more detailed description of the health system changes made by the program, as well as details on the community volunteers and community health workers.
- Sampling methods: Provided additional details on the sampling plan, the calculations that determined the sample size, and clarified that the analysis at follow-up included only comparable respondents, namely ever-married women, aged 15-49 with a live birth in the past 5 years.
- Mortality rate calculations: Added a description of the method used to calculate the mortality rates.

Results:

- Redid Table 1 to show the Baseline Household Survey (BHS) characteristics only for the women included in the analysis, and conducted t-tests to test for significant differences between the BHS and Final Household Survey (FHS). These are reported in the table and discussed in the text. There were no longer significant differences in age or education, but there were differences in reported occupation and cell phone ownership, which were discussed.
Conclusions: Changed the conclusions to focus more on the research questions, namely whether the integration of community-based child health promotion with system-wide changes to the PHC system will lead to increased uptake of home care and clinic care activities. Removed the discussion of anti-tetanus vaccinations, which are only a part of that picture, not the limelight.

Reviewer 2:
Results: Thanks for bringing in triangulation! Helped to revise the discussion (and the background), particularly to bring in the relevance of the study results to relevant research and outstanding research questions on strategies to improve home care of newborns and sick children. Removed the rows in the Table 4 pertaining to traditional medicine as not really relevant to our questions re. conduct of recommended newborn and sick child care. The traditional medicine literature is a completely different stream of research, and we deemed it a distraction from the main analysis.

Reviewer 3:
Title: Changed “impact” to “results”
Background:
• Added in the literature citations that place this study in the context of other studies of alternative methods to improve newborn and sick child care and outcomes.
• This lead to a sharper focus on the unique contribution of this study, namely to clarify how these community-based activities would work if the PHC system changes accompanied the community initiatives.

Methods:
• Extensive revision of the methods section to detail how the study was carried out.
• Inclusion of the theoretical model for the intervention and for the evaluation methods.
• Survey question reliability: Added more detail on how we assessed changes in knowledge and behavior; the origin of the questions, namely from Demographic and Health Survey or INDEPTH Network, previously validated questions. We did add response options tailored to the program, but the questions were standard.
• Assessment of participation in the intervention: Indicated that participation is measured by residence in a community with the interventions as well as by response to questions pertaining to source of advice or treatment.

Discussion and conclusion: Both greatly revised and now include significance of our findings to the wider literature on this topic.
Abstract: Revised, including the conclusions, so it matches the revised conclusions.
Thank you again for the opportunity to publish this work in BMC-Public Health, and let us know if you need anything more to help with making your final decision.

With regards,

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