Reviewer's report

Title: Qualitative evaluation of the Teenage Mothers Project in Uganda: A community-based empowerment intervention for unmarried teenage mothers

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Reviewer: Ademola Ajuwon

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Qualitative evaluation of the Teenage Mothers Project in Uganda: A community-based empowerment intervention for unmarried teenage mothers

Reviewer: Ademola J. Ajuwon, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

General comments

The paper is well written and adequately referenced. The Teenage Mothers Project (TMP) from which the paper was derived is a well intentioned initiative directed at addressing the psychological, social and economic problems and challenges that unmarried teenage mothers face in a rural district of Uganda. The qualitative approach used to evaluate the benefits derived from the project is appropriate as it provided opportunity for teenage mothers and other stakeholders to fully express their perceptions on the benefits of the TMP in ameliorating the challenges of premarital childbearing in rural Uganda. However, there are several areas of the manuscript that would require revisions and clarifications before the paper can be recommended for publication in BMC.

Major revisions

Recommended Revisions

The details of the issues for revision and clarifications are provided below:

1. There is need for a brief description of the social and economic context of Manafwa district so that readers can interpret the data within the context in which the study took place. The authors stated that several communities in the Manafwa participated in the study, but the actual number was not provided. This should be addressed.

2. Although the authors adopted a qualitative approach to investigate benefits of the TMP, there are several quantitative data presented as well; see for example, the demographic data on page 13. The authors need to fully describe how these data were collected in the methods section. I also suggest that these demographic data and those listed later in the paper could be summarized on a table, thereby saving space since the paper is generally long.

3. I expected the authors to describe the process through which the 1036 unmarried teenage mothers involved in TMP were identified, recruited and retained in the study. This is an important information since there was evidence that some of the girls dropped out of the program. Is there any way of knowing
the proportion of girls who were unmarried mothers in similar situation in Manafwa who were not recruited into the study? Does the figure 1036 represent all teenage unmarried mothers in the district during 2000 and 2012? If not, what is the proportion of teenage mother recruited into the study in relation to the total? Please clarify

4. There is need to provide the equivalent value of the local currency (Shillings) cited in the paper in US dollars so that readers have a sense of the value of these amount.

5. There are several statements in the paper that must be supported by figures; for example the authors mentioned on page 16 that communities gave teenage mothers support groups a plot of land or venue for their activities, that teenage mothers raised income. It will be helpful to know how many groups received such gifts and the actual amount raised by the girls. It will also be helpful to give actual percentage instead of estimates (30-40%) of ‘girls who had married at an early age, some to the fathers of their child’ (page 23)

6. It is disappointing that despite being targets of interventions, some participants of the TMP still participated in transactional sex. There is need to elaborate on this practice and why the TMP did not succeed in influencing this problem.

7. The idea of exchange of a female goat for a cow is interesting and readers not familiar with this practice would like to know more about it. I suggest that the authors elaborate how this actually takes place because a goat is apparently less valuable than a cow.

8. There is need to elaborate or maybe clarify whether girls enrolled in the TMP were requested to exit from it once they re-enrolled in school or were retained regardless of their educational achievements. In addition, are there some milestones which the girls must attain before they exit from the project? Please clarify.

Minor essential revisions

9. It is appropriate that the authors acknowledge the limitations of the study. However, I suggest all strengths be discussed first before mentioning the limitations. There is a mix-up on this in the discussion section. I also suggest that the authors should use the abbreviation TMP once it is defined the first time. The results section of the abstract is scanty. I suggest the authors provide some more data and shorten the conclusion. As it is now, the conclusion is longer than the results.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**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 do not have competing interests