Reviewer's report

Title: The context and practice of handwashing among new mothers in Serang, Indonesia: a formative study

Version: 1 Date: 4 November 2012

Reviewer: Robert Dreibelbis

Reviewer's report:

Compulsory revisions:

1) There are several compelling aspects of this manuscript, notably the application of novel methods for assessing handwashing practices among mothers, the role of life-style changes during the peri-natal period and the potential for leveraging these changes to promote and/or influence behavioral outcomes. However, these aspects of the manuscript remain under-explored in the current presentation. A large section of the result focuses on handwashing moments and practices – which, while relevant to documenting handwashing behaviors – may not be the main contribution this manuscript can make to the field.

2) P.7: Please give more details on filming. How was this completed? Was a field worker in the home or the camera placed in a stationary place? If the objective of the paper is to highlight the contribution of the method, more detail needs to be given here.

3) p. 7 Interviews: Please describe the interviews in greater details. How were motivations defined and/or selected? How were picture cards used in the interviews?

4) P. 8: Analysis: Please provide more details on the methods of analysis used. Was this facilitated with any software? Were themes identified a priori or emergent from the data? If an existing theoretical model was used, please provide further exploration. If the thematic analysis was informed by the model used in reference 6, it would be good to include a greater presentation or description of this model in the introduction.

5) p. 9: Descriptive results of handwashing practices, particularly differences between urban and rural households, affluence and level of education, etc requires more data to support. Even with a small sample, simple frequencies that reflect some of this distribution would help support these statements.

6) P.12: “While women recognize…” This sentence would benefit from more context. Was this in the context of specific illnesses (ie; diarrhea) or just in reference to illness in general? Was this a discussion of possible prevention methods or causes? Did women say that handwashing was unimportant (this is what is suggested by the presentation) or that they did not specifically indicate
that handwashing was important?

7) P.12 “We found little evidence...” This implies that there is a direct pre- and post-comparison between handwashing behaviours in the study. It is difficult to determine if the scripts and the daily routines were specific enough to gather data on handwashing practices without a further explanation of the methods and structure of the interview.

8) P.14 “Three mothers...” Although one example is provided, evidence on how the other women changed practices in response to filming is needed. In general, the discussion of reactivity needs additional thought. One of the studies cited by the authors (Ram et al.) suggests that changes in practice due to observation are the norm, not the exception – yet the authors suggest that only three individuals altered behaviors due to the presence of the cameras. A more detailed and thorough investigation on reactivity in this context is needed to support the authors’ conclusion of minimal reactivity among participants.

9) P.20: Table: The data presentation here is confusing. Are the two categories presented (hw w/ water and hw / soap) exclusive of one another? Is HW w/water specifically handwashing without soap? Or were soap users not using water? It may be more useful to group the two columns by unit of analysis (events vs. women) than by behavior type. It seems most rational that all handwashing included water – perhaps this category should reflect all handwashing and handwashing with soap should represent a subset of this group?

Minor essential revisions:
1) P.11: What is Jamu?

Discretionary Revisions:
1) General comments: The framing of the introduction and conclusions include a large focus on video ethnography and script elicitation as novel methods to investigate lives and hygiene practices of new mothers, however – the discussion of these approaches in the methods is minimal and there are only a few instances where the results and discussion seem to reference and/or reflect on data collection methods. (Please see additional comments re: reactivity.) Additional information on the benefits of these methods (how interview techniques provided information that would have otherwise been absent? How videos provided an opportunity to correct and or inform observations, etc.) would benefit the article. Making the methods a more robust part of both the results and discussion would make the case for further application of these approaches stronger.

2) Results from the Interviews are woven throughout, but no direct quotes or words from the respondents are included. Presenting the findings of the qualitative portion of the study would help give more context to many interview results. Quotes and/or more data from the interviews would significantly bolster the results section on life-style changes, particularly what messages mothers try
to follow and who the trusted sources of health information come from – particularly in light of the over-arching suggestion that the birth of a child presents a teachable moment.

3) p.4: “adopt new behaviours to minimize health risk”: to both the mother and child? To the child?

4) p.4: “Such interventions benefit from the frequent contact women have with the health system at this time”: How does this relate to the overall study? It seems like this aspect would be better included in the discussion as a possible way to promote and/or motivate handwashing in this population.

5) p.6: Data collection: “This is very difficult to investigate…” This information may be better suited in the introduction or discussion, rather than in the middle of the methods, particularly if an objective of the paper is to discuss ways in which the methods used here are novel or unique.

6) p.8: Incomes: Mean income in this case doesn’t give much of a sense of income range, particularly with the high degree of variability in education. Can you report categories?

7) P.10 defecation-related events: “Appeared to cue handwashing…” More explanation is needed for this interpretation to be justified. Were there aspects of the video recording that suggests this acted as a cue? If not – this may be an interpretation that is better moved to the discussion.

8) P.12: The motivators identified and used to explain specific practices would be strengthened by the inclusion of more results from the interviews or script elicitation rather than linking the motivators solely through theoretical understandings of behaviors.

9) P.13: “The same mother was observed…” Is there a way to present more data on within subject heterogeneity in handwashing practices? Even a small paragraph on this in the methods section could strengthen the statements here.

10) P.13: “as most handwashing behavior is automatic” I find this statement particularly strong given that only one source is cited here. This thought also seems to fit better in the next paragraph as part of a discussion on automaticity and habit.

11) p.13: “to be involved in the delivery of an intervention” This could use elaboration. What type of intervention? How could they be involved? Drawing more on the results of the study to make this a more robust discussion of the ways in which midwives could be used to influence behavioral outcomes would be helpful here.

12) P.14: “as well as provide clues…” More information on the ways this articles suggests inserting handwashing into the appropriate points of women’s daily lives would be helpful. What are the specific suggestions?
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 I have no competing interests.