Reviewer's report

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

Version: 1 Date: 12 November 2012

Reviewer: Pavani Ram

Reviewer's report:

Overall, this is a very useful study that describes the novel circumstances that might affect a new mother’s handwashing behavior. I have a few major concerns and a number of relatively minor and discretionary revisions. I hope these comments are helpful. Thank you for the opportunity to review this interesting paper.

Major compulsory revisions

The rationale and the discussion delve into the possibility of late pregnancy and new motherhood representing teachable moments for handwashing. However, as currently framed, the data are not organized around informing this concept. It does not seem sufficient to indicate that there are changes in a woman’s schedule once she has a baby. That would have been evident without the performance of this study. In what ways did the participants indicate their own receptiveness to new information? Might organizing some of the data analysis around McBride’s heuristic of teachable moments help in this regard?

Overall, the data are relatively thin with respect to perceived motivators and barriers to handwashing behavior. The authors assert in the discussion that handwashing was being driven largely by disgust and comfort, but provide little qualitative data to support those assertions. Did the semi-structured interviews elicit information on perceived motivators and barriers?

The process and utility of script elicitation is not clear as currently presented. It is clear that the authors seek to highlight this method (as evidenced by the first sentence of the conclusions) but, to this reviewer and perhaps to other readers, the rationale / benefit of using script elicitation will remain unclear after reading the paper. In particular, detail could be added in the methods and discussion.

It appears that two of the four researchers were LSHTM staff. I assume they were non-Indonesian. Do the authors have any concerns about the possible bias that might have been introduced by non-Indonesian interviewers?

Results, Life-style changes

• This section seems to lose focus on handwashing.
• Do family living structures typically support the assumption of household responsibilities by other family members?
Do any of the advisors comment on handwashing?

Explain the role of the midwife after labor and delivery. The manuscript implies that the midwife continues to advise the mother but not much detail is provided in this regard.

Minor essential revisions

- Describe “food-hygiene junctures”.
- Background, 5th paragraph: singular-plural mismatch: “a mother’s hygiene….of their child”
- Methods, paragraph 2 – spell out IDHS
- Other investigators might wish to understand the mechanics of getting field staff into place by 4 am!
- Data analysis, paragraph 1 - clarify whether video review was routinely done during semi-structured interviews. if so, what was the purpose and what did it achieve?
- Results, handwashing practice paragraph, sentences preceding the table to be inserted – the authors must acknowledge somewhere that this is a rather more affluent population than those encountered in many low-income settings, where neonatal mortality is prevalent.
- Results, para on “defecation-related events”
  - Should the first sentence convey that handwashing stations are located inside bathrooms, rather than being outside where they would be visible? That isn’t clear.
  - Were babies changed or their nappies?
  - how was it clear that the presence of the handwashing station in the bedroom cued the handwashing after the baby had defecated? And did she wash her hands after the baby’s defecation or after she cleaned the baby?
- Discussion, 2nd paragraph:
  - “to practice a behaviour desired by the midwife”, or perceived to be desired by the observer?
  - in the subsequent sentence, the fact that one mother was observed to respond differently wasn’t made clear in the results
- Discussion, paragraph before conclusions
  - the Village Midwife Form was not previously introduced.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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 have no competing interests.