Reviewer's report

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

Version: 2 Date: 4 January 2013

Reviewer: Robert Dreibelbis

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Major compulsory revisions:

1. Table 1 provides a much clearer explanation of the HW categories than present in the text. I think this classification is both interesting and insightful. If data available, it would be good to draw more direct comparisons between these groups in later sections of the manuscript. As is, this classification provides a bit of effort to understand and digest, but is never returned to in the subsequent results or discussion. Does this breakdown suggest different intervention strategies?

2. Discussion, Paragraph 3: “New mothers…” This paragraph seems to contract the previous section that presents nurture as not a primary driver of handwashing in this context.

3. Discussion, paragraph 4: “However, we believe…” through ““generation to generation of mothers.”: This section introduces information and interpretations that are not reflected in the results and/or cited as additional information. The only statement supported by the data is “On the other hand, it is common practice for new mothers to return…how to care for newborn babies”. This data should be presented in the results. While there are mentions of concerns about diarrhea and other illnesses, these presented as natural stages of child development. There is no mention of mothers mortality or even any dire risk to the child.

4. Discussion, paragraph 5: What elaborate rituals were observed? Please provide more details on these in the results. Similarly, the “baskets” are first introduced in the discussion section. If this provides a potential intervention strategy it would be helpful to introduce these during the results.

Minor Essential revisions:

1. Table 2: Please check the math on the “Before serving food” category. The number of participations who wash hands with water only is larger than the number of times the event was accompanied by handwashing.

2. Are midwife and traditional birth attendant the same thing? The terms seem to be used interchangeable.
Discretionary revisions:

1. **Discussion / Analysis:** It remains unclear the extent to which the conceptual framework presented by Curtis et al (reference 6) informed either the analysis or interpretation of the data. If the thematic analysis took an emergent approach and the findings from this study support that framework and/or challenge, it would be important to note that. However, if this framework was used to guide semi-structured interview guide development and/or subsequent analysis of the data, then the introduction would benefit from at least a brief presentation of the theoretical model. Addressing the theoretical orientation would allow these findings to inform a more general understanding of handwashing practices and the determinants of those practices.

2. Given that handwashing with mud or ash is often presented as a viable means for washing hands, I initially interpreted the “dirt washers” and “dirt rinser” as people who used dirt for handwashing purposes. It wasn’t until I read the footnotes on Table 1 that this became clear. A different name may avoid similar confusion for other readers.

**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