Reviewer's report

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

Version: 2 Date: 14 February 2013

Reviewer: Pavani Ram

Reviewer's report:

Compulsory revisions

1) My largest concern with the manuscript remains that, in the rationale and methods, the authors assert that the study elicited substantive information on the motivators and barriers to handwashing behavior. However, the results do not support this assertion. We see relatively little information provided directly by respondents about the drivers of handwashing, even though, on page 14 in the discussion section, the authors state “Observation and interview responses lead us to conclude that handwashing at these times is most likely to be driven by feelings of “disgust”…”.

2) Also, the recommendations regarding critical times for handwashing in the neonatal period would benefit from further thought about leading causes of neonatal morbidity / mortality, and transmission pathways.

Abstract:

3) No data are presented in the results section that support the final sentence of the conclusions.

Results:

4) Define unusual terms such as “dirt washers” and “dirt rinsers” in the text of the methods section rather than as a footnote to a table. Also, what was the purpose of categorizing individuals in this way. Might some individuals be dirt washers at some critical times, and be avoiders at other critical times?

5) On page 10, there is interpretation about handwashing status being linked to education. These seem like discussion points and should be moved to the relevant section.

6) The information around lifestyle changes is important but the section of the manuscript loses focus on handwashing behavior (page 12). Can appropriate findings relevant to the implications of these lifestyle changes on handwashing behavior be integrated into this section?

Discussion

7) Regarding the statement on page 14 that “disgust’ may not be an effective handwashing promotion message”, have the authors considered that disgust may not be elicited by the neonate’s urine / feces, but that disgust related to external factors (other children’s feces, respiratory secretions) might be more
motivating?

8) Did the data from the study confirm McBride’s heuristic for the teachable moment (reference 8)?

9) The authors suggest that “contact with faeces…should be the primary concern” for those promoting handwashing behavior (page 16). Have the authors considered that, whereas diarrhea is a relatively minor cause of neonatal mortality, pneumonia and sepsis (resulting from both Gram positive and Gram negative bacteria, as well as viruses) far more frequently cause deaths in the neonatal period? Thus, the times believed to be “critical” for handwashing in the post-neonatal period do not necessarily extend to the neonatal period. Also, the neonate is at lower risk of auto-infection as a result of exposure to his/her own feces than infection from the feces of other children and adults.

Minor revisions requested

Methods
10) video recording: describe why having the field worker stay in the home would have reduced reactivity

Results
11) What’s a defecation pond (page 11)?
12) Regarding the woman who appeared to have handwashing cued by the presence of the handwashing station (Page 11) – how did the authors deduce this? This leads me to the question of how video data were analyzed in order to identify motivators and barriers to handwashing. Whereas, in the results section, the authors describe that video can help in this regard, the process of actually identifying the motivators and barriers using video footage is not clear to this reader.

Discussion
13) page 18: please use an alternate word for “mugging”, since that word has varying connotations. In the United States for example, a “mugging” is an assault, with the intent to rob the victim.

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.