Reviewer's report

Title: Malaria-related perceptions and practices of women with under-five children in rural Ethiopia

Version: 1 Date: 28 December 2008

Reviewer: Helen Bromley

Reviewer's report:

'Malaria-related perceptions and practices of women with under-five children in rural Ethiopia'

Wakgari Deressa and Ahmed Ali

Research Article submitted to BMC Public Health

This is an interesting article which examines an issue of great public health importance. The aim of the study is clearly defined: to investigate local perceptions, knowledge, practices and treatment-seeking behaviour for malaria, in Adami-Tulu District, South-Central Ethiopia. This was a mixed methods study, comprising a large community-based cross-sectional descriptive survey supplemented by 3 Focus Group Discussions in three different villages. The study population consisted of women with a child under the age of five, in Adami-Tulu District (n=2087). The study was carried out in 2003.

Discretionary Revisions

1. I would challenge the penultimate sentence in the abstract, which states that “People, especially women, need to be educated on the link between mosquitoes and malaria.” It is well recognised that education alone will not change much. ITNs will have to be affordable and available as well. In addition, the nature of gender relations is paramount in women gaining access to goods and services. Men, as traditional heads of households and primary decision makers therefore need to be educated too, so that they too understand the importance of ITNs.

2. There should be a fuller description of what is mean by informed consent on page 7.

3. Data are mostly reported as simple proportions, supplemented by some quotes from the qualitative data. There is no mention of negative cases in the qualitative part of the study, nor any mention of how the data might be triangulated.

4. There could be more discussion and fewer results.

5. There is a tendency to report recommendations and conclusions in the discussion section which would be better separated out.
6. Given that the data are 5 years old, and that ITNs have been mainstreamed more in this area since then, a follow-up study to examine the relative success – or not of ITNs would be useful.

Major compulsory revisions

7. The first three paragraphs of the methods section describe the study setting rather than the methods per se. They should be removed to a separate section entitled ‘Study Setting’.

8. 3708 households were visited and 2087 mothers with at least one child under the age of 5 were interviewed. It is unclear whether this represents 3708 households in total, of which 2087 contained mothers with a child less than five years old, or whether it represents 3708 households with a mother and child under 5, of which 2087 consented to take part in the study. Please clarify.

9. There is no mention of the response rate- please include.

10. The qualitative data comprised three focus groups and in depth-interviews (page 7). There is no mention of who actually took part in the in-depth interviews, or how many were done, etc. There is no mention of how the topic guides and interview schedules were developed. The analysis of the qualitative data is weak, and there is no mention of quality assurance procedures or references that have guided the analysis of the data. Please address these issues.

11. The limitations of the study must be included before the paper can be accepted for publication.

12. The paper needs to be proof read by a native English speaker. There is a tendency to write in very long sentences for example the paragraph at the bottom of page 4. The last two sentences of page 13 also needs to be made clearer. Bottom of page 14 – the English around CHWs needs clarifying - it reads as though the CHWs are telling the women to go and get malaria.

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

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**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