Reviewer’s report

Title: Health care seeking among tuberculosis suspects and pulmonary TB patients in rural Ethiopia: a community-based study

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Reviewer: Weibing Wang

Reviewer’s report:

Major Compulsory Revisions:

This study is designed as a community based cross-sectional study, to investigate an important issue in TB control, the accessibility to TB health care, in a setting of HIV high burden countries. Although this study is similar to other studies conducted on health seeking of TB care, there are aspects of this study that is specific for this population and thus are of interest. It added information to the literature on factors related to healthcare delay, and provides information specific to the population and health system that might inform improvements in patient care. Below are several comments:

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
According to the authors, the objective of this study was to describe and analyze health care seeking among TB suspects and pulmonary TB (PTB) cases in a rural district. The research question posed by the authors is easily understood but not very clear for me.

First, the authors need to provide information on the meaning and importance of the study within the context of its field. There have been a number of literatures that has been focusing on diagnostic delay among TB patients worldwide and in Africa, although the authors argued that no such kind of study had been previously conducted/reported in Ethiopia. The authors need to extend their literature review and explain why the current study is different with the existed literature and what will be added into the literatures. I noticed that there was a paper published on diagnostic and treatment delay among pulmonary tuberculosis patients in Ethiopia (BMC Infect Dis. 2005 Dec 12;5:112. If I am right, it is the first author who published that paper). I recommended the authors to indicate the difference between the two studies. Another study was on delayed diagnosis in 10 DOTS districts of Ethiopia (BMC Public Health. 2009 Feb 9;9:53.).

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
The description for the subjects for interview was clear. But I am confused about sputum microscopy. The manuscript indicated that the sputum microscopy was performed by three experienced laboratory technicians. Did the 3 technicians test every slides or only one of them did so? What is the procedure and criterion for
quality of control?

I understand that the pilot study was to test the questionnaire, but the authors should clarify that to what extent they have done for this pilot study and what is the result and how did they adjust after the pilot?

The sampling methods should be given more information. It is said that the kebeles were randomly selected, which could not clearly tell the procedure. Without that information, readers would not know how the kebeles were randomly sampled.

The part of statistical analysis is unclear. The authors used logistics regression analysis to assess associations between socio-demographic and clinical factors with the outcome variables, but did not explain what is the objective for this analysis? Also, I cannot locate this from the results section. The procedure and criteria of variable selection for multivariate analysis is not convincing, especially when only the variables with a p value less than 0.25 were included for the analysis.

3. Are the data sound?
This is a community-based study, making the data more representative. However, it can be improved if the authors can provide the information regarding the proportions of recruited subjects/total population in the community.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
The coverage rate for this study is very important, which was not reported by the authors. The authors will have to provide the number of subjects lost to investigate, the characteristics of this missing group and may do some comparison if possible.

The table 1 should give a p value for each demographic item. In table 2, a p value should also be given.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
The discussion section should be reorganized and well-framed. The discussion need to be more focused and extensively, other than only interpret the results. This study was highlighted by "community-based", but there is no discussions regarding the study design. Moreover, unsupported comments should be noted by the reviewer.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
No.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
Clear.
8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
The title can be more accurate. How about “Health care seeking among pulmonary tuberculosis (TB) suspects and patients in rural Ethiopia: a community-based study”?

9. Is the writing acceptable?
The writing is acceptable, although a number of grammar errors exist and need to be revised. Here are some of them:
Page 6, the last sentence should be “socio-demographic” other than “socio-deomgraphic”.
Page 7 Para 3, sometime the authors used “present tense”, but sometime they used “past tense” to describe the methods.
Page 13 Para 2, “The authors declare that they have no competing interests” and Page 6 Para 4 “TB suspect is an individual with a history of cough for 2 weeks or more, with or without other symptoms suggestive of TB” lost interpunction”.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**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.