Reviewer's report

Title: Policy makers’ and Providers’ Knowledge and Attitudes Regarding the Provision of Emergency Contraceptive Pills within Lao PDR

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Reviewer: Jane Harries

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Title : Policy makers’ and Providers' Knowledge and Attitudes Regarding the Provision of Emergency Contraceptive Pills within Lao PDR
Authors: Vanphanom Sychareun, Keokedthong Phongsavan, Visanou Hansana and Alongkone Phengsavanh

Review of article:
Policy makers’ and Providers’ Knowledge and Attitudes Regarding the Provision of Emergency Contraceptive Pills within Lao PDR

Thank you for asking me to review this interesting article.

Major compulsory revisions and general comments

This article is very descriptive and it is not very clear what the central research problematic is apart from exploring at providers knowledge and attitudes towards EC.

The article also lacks context – more needs to be explained about Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) services in Lao PDR and how EC would be incorporated into these services or other health services.

Background

In this section it would be useful to provide more context as for many readers, myself included, very little is known about Lao and it health care system, though as a developing country there might be resonance with other developing countries in Africa and Latin America. This would provide some context as to why EC is unavailable in Lao and also the importance of this study. Why investigate providers and policy makers attitudes towards a product that is not available or FDA approved in the country.

Why focus on this particular method of preventing an unplanned pregnancy and not another?
There are many unanswered questions or provision of background that would make the paper and research more compelling. For example
What are attitudes towards childbearing, what role does the state play, what are
the predominant methods of contraception and are they readily available – are they provided free in the public healthcare sector – what is the role of the private sector with regards to SRH and access to contraceptives.

Are abortions legal in Lao etc all this would provide some backdrop to providers attitudes towards EC which in many countries is viewed as an abortifacient – (bearing in mind that EC is not an abortifacient yet these views also do emerge in this study) and thus would be interesting to know status of abortion in Lao and predominant religious beliefs of respondents and countrywide.

Methods
Study setting
This is unclear- a detailed explanation of the study sites needs to be provided
What is provided on page 6 under study site is a description of the formal health system in the country and not where the interviews were conducted – how does this relate to the various study sites in Vientiane City?
Study participants needs to be defined and included in the methods section
Socio demographic information in a uniform manner needs to be provided so that the reader has a clear idea who was interviewed, from which site, and what their position was i.e. health care provider (public or private) and policymaker and what kind of policy maker?
What kinds of clinics were these – were they primary health care clinics, family planning clinics providing SRH health care services or hospitals?
Why were private clinics included in this study and what role does private health care play with regards to SRH and contraception or provision of EC in this setting?

Research instruments
What were these guidelines – what were the issues explored?
Please expand what is meant by standardized guidelines page 8.
This is unclear – Please expand how was data collected what were the selection criteria and did all those approached agree to participate
Who analysed the data?
Who conducted the interviews and what training did they have? This is important to know –
Ethical clearance-how was confidentiality ensured – it is not mentioned – what steps if any were in place to ensure anonymity?

Why were in depth face to face interviews chosen – why was this deemed important

Results
This section needs to be tightened up – as it reads it is very descriptive
Attitudes towards ECP

These subheadings
Access
Target population
Distribution channels
Might be more useful

Overall not clear what the difference if any was between policy makers and providers and between public and private providers knowledge and attitudes towards EC – it might be useful to provide a paragraph summing up what the differences were if any between these different stakeholders.

General comments

It would have provided more strength to the study if women or potential recipients of EC had been interviewed and a possible limitation to the study

There are no stated limitations to this study and this needs to be discussed.

The literature needs to be updated as there has been much written since 2006 – there are no references after 2006 in the reference section.

The article needs to be located within the broader SRH arena

The discussion and conclusions need to be re worked

The conclusion is repetitive and there is no clear message

In view of the fact that this article is in the Health Services Research BMC journal more should be discussed in terms of recommendations or suggestions as to how EC can be rolled out in Lao and if so how it can be integrated into other health services including perhaps private and or sexual assault services.


Population Council might be useful in looking at how EC can be introduced in developing country settings.

This manuscript needs to be checked for numerous typos.

Clarifications and minor essential revisions

1. Page 4 last paragraph : what are these natural methods?

What are these other forms of contraception
2. First sentence page 5 what are these additional methods? And why where they not available in some private clinics.

3. Page 5 Need clearer descriptions of different EC methods see WHO guidelines

4. last sentence page 5 suggest replace ignorance with poor levels of knowledge

5. Page 6 Methods Study setting The first sentence needs to be re written to read The study was carried out in Vientaine the capital city of Lao PDR.

6. Page 8 Second paragraph should read In -depth interviews were carried out face to face with the key informants…….

7. Page 9 – First word should read Ethical clearance. Second paragraph under Results should read nine years of working experience ( not nice years)

8. References page 21 [16] Abuabara et al typo should read As often as needed: appropriate use of emergency contraceptive pills

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.