Reviewer's report

Title: Bypassing primary health care facilities: Perceived and experienced quality of care offered to sick children in rural Tanzania

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Reviewer: Arslan Mazhar

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General:
The research question crafted by the author capitate factors influencing bypass of primary care facilities and exploration of caretakers experiences in seeking care for their under five children. The question posed is important and certainly deserves some attention. However, the authors depicted quality of the primary health services through experiences and perceptions of the caretakers recruited at district health facilities through non-probability convenience sampling; a weak approach in the study. The factors which popped out from study population are not necessarily the independent predictors for a caretaker if recruited at household/first level care facility. Keeping in view of above points, enrolment of study population at district level did not truly answer research question. The research question could be addressed more appropriately through generation of data at the primary care facilities/households. If this is not possible, limitation section shall justify all the weaknesses of this study. The discussion and the conclusion section are supported by data. The conclusion recommends provision of diagnostics and drugs for malaria, pneumonia and diarrhea treatment. Are you sure, the bypassing frequency can be reduced if these essentials are provided at PHC facilities? Evidence suggests, even meeting the needs of the supply side does not truly address reasons for bypassing. Revision is required to improve limitation section. The title and the abstract are compatible; nevertheless, the title can be more smart and short. Following are detailed comments:

Major compulsory revisions:

1. Background section is not crispy. “Bypass” is keyword in this study and deserves some debate in your background. Some content about previous evidence regarding exploration of factors influencing bypass shall be added. If there is limited evidence, even it can be taken as rationale of your study.

2. Case definition for the “Bypassers” as described in the data analysis section shall be moved to methods section. This definition should be specified more accurately to differentiate between a bypasser and non-bypass, e.g. specification of geographical distance from the primary health facility.

3. The type of sampling technique used to identify sample for the quantitative component shall be justified. i.e. its appears that non-probability convenient sampling was practiced to identify study population. There is dearth of
information in the methodology section about the number of respondents recruited/interviewed in the qualitative and the quantitative section. The study population shall be demonstrated in the methods section.

4. In the conclusion and the policy implication section, describe the importance of this phenomenon? e.g. increased frequency of bypassing will lead to weakened PHC facilities and less coverage for poor. As a result, there may be more focus by the health authorities to spend more in the secondary care setup carring unnecessary burden.

Minor compulsory revisions:

1. The care takers who were interviewed after admission and treatment of children in the ward may be having different levels of satisfaction as compared to a caretaker interviewed in outdoor clinics. This leads to information bias and should be addressed in the limitation section of the study.

2. The second paragraph of the “qualitative data collection” section states, “caretakers were asked to recall details on action....” A caretaker who recalled index child’s illness that occurred previously may give varied responses as compared to a caretaker who recalled recent episode. Recall bias shall be addressed in the limitation section of the study.

3. Describe that the association between potential factors and bypassing is weak due to lack of temporal relationship within your study. Address this in limitation section.

4. Quantitative analysis is a stepwise approach. Before going into multivariate analysis, it would be ideal to add in table between table 1 and 2 showing significant bivariate analysis supported by p-value.

5. In the results section under heading, “Bypass of primary care facilities”, the significant adjusted ratios (AOR in Table 2) shall be justified with p-value.

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.