Reviewer’s report

Title: The role of health extension workers in improving utilization of maternal health services in rural areas in Ethiopia: a cross sectional study

Version: 2 Date: 20 March 2012

Reviewer: Eilish McAuliffe

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Major Compulsory revisions

1. More clarity is needed in abstract e.g. reference is made to “model family” without explanation of what this is. Last sentence of results seems to be missing some information.

2. In the Methods section the meaning of the following sentence is unclear. It should be rephrased “Study participants were motivated to give a true answer through explaining the purpose and importance of the study and assured the confidentiality of the data”.

3. Taking the respondent’s word on whether they had completed the full package of interventions would seem to be less precise that collecting this from HEW logbooks. Some explanation for this course of action should be included.

4. The statement “This national survey was conducted at almost the same time as when the HEP was introduced” is too imprecise, as this could have a significant impact on what the study is using as baseline data. The exact timing of HEP programme start and dates of the national survey data collection should be provided.

5. Again the meaning is unclear in the following “Some of the women’s characteristics in the questionnaire were not distinctive, meaning that most answers were the same. Therefore, these variables were not used in the analysis. This concerned questions about religion, marital status and occupation.”

6. Authors need to be careful in their terminology. Does “sharp increase” represent a significant difference or not?

7. Later in the results section several references are made to the “significant” improvements in access to some services, but no information is provided on tests for significance on data from the EDHS 2005 and this study. This is a major omission as without this the claims made in the discussion do not hold up.

8. The first page of the discussion is a continuation of the results and should therefore be moved to the results section.

9. The authors should attempt to relate the findings of their study to the literature on utilisation of maternal health services in similar contexts. Although there is not a huge volume of work on HEWs specifically, several studies address the broader cultural and other barriers that influence women’s perceptions and
utilization of maternal services.

10. Authors should refer to the study by Ergano et al. (2012) Determinants of community based maternal health care service utilization in South Omo pastoral areas of Ethiopia Journal of Medicine and Medical Sciences Vol. 3(2) pp. 112-121. and indicate what additional information this manuscript adds.

Minor essential revisions

1. The low rate of deliveries in health facilities could have been influenced by many factors that have not been taken into account in this study. For example distance to the health facility, timing and frequency of HEWs visits, household decision-making practices etc. The fact that the study did not collect data on any of these variables should really be acknowledged as a study limitation.


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: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests