Reviewer's report

Title: Integrated maternal and child health services in Mozambique: Structural health system limitations overshadow its effects on follow-up of HIV-exposed infants

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Reviewer: Kwasi Torpey

Reviewer's report:

The paper titled 'Integrated Maternal and Child health services in Mozambique: Structural health systems overshadow its effect of follow up of HIV exposed infants' discusses integration of INMCH services and measuring outcomes post integration. This paper addresses issues of integration and health systems in Tete, Mozambique. The paper will require significant revisions for it to be ready for publication

Compulsory revisions

1. General: a. The paper requires significant copy editing to improve the quality of English. Words like outspoken are used when the authors mean pronounced/increased/significant/predominant. In addition terms like stock rupture is unclear. I believe the authors implied stock out. Editing of the paper by a fluent/native English speaker is necessary.

b. Integration is desirable but is not always necessarily the most effective/efficient. The approach is very important ie one-stop, referral model etc. The model would depend on the set up and patient/client flow of the facility. This has to be adequately described in the Methods under Context. One of the key positive and probably the most important outcomes for integration is the clients' perspective. This study looks at service statistics, providers' perspective but the does not examine clients who are utilizing the services and the effect of integration on utilization of services. Client interviews may have provided some partial insights to declining service utilization post intervention and whether health system challenges were responsible

2. Specific:

Methods; a. Intervention-control in 3 pairs of public health centres is confusing. I believe the authors meant 6 sites were selected with three each in the control and intervention group respectively. It will be useful to describe the level of these facilities ie primary, secondary or tertiary

b. The Method section should be properly structured. This is a mixed methods research. It will be better for readers, if the quantitative part is organized under a different subheading followed by the qualitative. In current format, authors describe the quantitative methods in the first paragraph followed by qualitative and end with more description of quantitative in the third paragraph. For ease of reading, the quantitative section should be pulled together followed by the
c. Results: The results should be organized in the same format as the methods ie quantitative and qualitative findings.

The qualitative results of two different health workers working in the same room separated by a screen just to have access to the clinical files is difficult to comprehend. Adequately describing the patient flow pre and post intervention would not be out of place.

If staff numbers remain unchanged, it is difficult to appreciate how integration increases the work load if the client flow is well structured?

Participants mentions increasing attendance and HIV tests post intervention but this does not seem to be supported by the quantitative data which show declining attendances.

Structural health systems factors like staff shortages and stock outs could be responsible for the decline post intervention. The authors however have to rule out the effect of secular trends. This require analysis of pre-intervention data 2yrs or more to observe trends. If this is not proven, the title will have to be revised since we are not sure health system factors is responsible for declining utilization.

Discussion: The discussion must be revised to reflect all the changes above.

Abstract: The abstract will have to be revised to reflect all the changes

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

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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