Reviewer's report

Title: Consumer Knowledge and Availability Of Maternal And Child Health Services: A Challenge For Achieving MDG 4 And 5 In Southeast Nigeria

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Reviewer: Siriel Massawe

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Major Compulsory Revisions

1. General: The question posed by the authors is not clear- the last two sentences under introduction need to be rephrased for clarity. The authors studied in reproductive age from the study area who had used MCH services either for themselves or their children- yet it is stated in the last but one sentence of the introduction that “However it is not yet known what and where maternal and child health services are available to consumers in the study area” What services had these women used?

In my opinion the question posed is not well defined. It is also not clear as to whether the authors had the information that the primary health care facilities were as opposed to the first and second referral hospitals & private hospitals were underutilized by women. There is no information provided in the introduction to suggest that this was the case.

Will knowledge on availability of services (alone) result in utilization of services? On the contrary studies, as well as practical experience show that women face numerous other barriers to utilization of services including socio-economic, cultural, geographical as well as perceived poor quality of available services.

2. Methods

Study area – there is a lot of information give on the political/administrative structure but very scanty information on available health facilities /maternal health services in the selected study area. We are informed that were 30 health facilities owned by government- but we are not told how many are hospitals/ and how many are primary health care facilities, as well as private hospitals. Are the public facilities free or there are user fees charged? What is the role of the other facilities mentioned (table 3) including pharmacies, and patient medicine shop and TBA in relation to the study question? Do they all provide MCH services? Is there data on the utilization of these government facilities for MCH? The relevant aspects of the study area need to be better described.

Sampling and sample size: It is not clear how a sample of 450 women was arrived at. According to the cluster sampling described the authors selected area had 20 clusters from which they randomly selected five ward clusters. From each of the five wards 77 eligible women of child bearing age were randomly selected. This should have given a sample size of 77x5 = 385 women!
Data collection and analysis.- It is not clear whether information regarding utilization of services, experience with services and suggestions on improving MCH services by mothers in the community was collected – as described in the last sentence under study design- If so data was only partially analyzed as this information is not presented.

Interviews of women: were the women spontaneously mentioning the available services or did the interviewer read them out for them to agree or disagree?

3. Results: The results section is rather scanty. There is no reference to the tables 1-3 in the text so it is difficult to follow the main result! There are problems with formatting and table 1 is difficult to read as several brackets appear in the middle of the table!

I suppose that interviewed women could mention more than one available service - if so this needs to be elaborated under the table. How was adequate/poor knowledge defined in the results? The women who were selected for interview according to the stated criteria were those who had used MCH services for themselves or for their children- so it is not clear what knowledge regarding MCH services they are hypothesized to lack. It would have been interesting if they had a comparison group of women who had never utilizes the available MCH services

4. Discussion: Poor knowledge seems to be main result discussed. A statement on paragraph 2 of the discussion is confusing and and does not seem to be based on the data presented. For example It states “Only ANC services for mothers and immunization for children were found available” Perhaps they meant to say ANC shows that other services were mentioned by an almost equal proportion of women – e.g delivery services was the most mentioned- but even then a look at table 2- . There is no data presented on utilization – so discussion and speculation on bypassing primary services is not based on the data presented on the three tables.

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 conflict of interests"