Reviewer's report

Title: The health and wellbeing of young people in sub-Saharan Africa: An under-researched area?

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Reviewer: matthew F chersich

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Major compulsory revisions

1. The article is well written, covers an important topic, which is divided into sensible categories. The authors draw on a large body of work, and have clearly read and understood a substantial literature.

2. My concerns about the article centre mainly on the methods used and the ability of the reader to understand how the authors reached their conclusions.

3. The editors need to decide if this topic fits within the scope of the journal, and whether the article would be better considered as an opinion piece, rather than a journal article. The editors are best placed to make that decision.

4. In a few places the authors use the term “demographic dividend from a growing population”, but do not explain what this means, where they draw the term from. It would be useful to provide a reference for this term and expand its meaning in detail. This seems central to the paper, if research were done on the topics suggested, and those findings applied, then Africa may get a demographic dividend (undefined by the authors). The authors also need to provide more clear justification for their argument that more evidence is what is required to help countries take advantage of the demographic dividend. It may well be that there is enough evidence but the problem is poor implementation and poor governance in these countries. Additional evidence will make little impact if the principal problem remains poor governance and leadership. The contention that additional evidence is part of the solution for assisting the youthful population may be true, but some limitations of this approach should be noted. It does not necessarily follow that more evidence will improve the youth in Africa.

5. The paper appears more like an opinion piece than a journal article. The methods for writing the review are not stated. It appears that the paper presents the opinions of the authors on the topic, a narrative review. Overall, the authors draw many conclusions which the reader is left wondering are correct, or an extension of the available data. For example, are African economies really declining? What measure was used to draw that conclusion? In the globalisation section, the authors state that exclusion of youth from power, work and education is growing. Please provide evidence that the problem is worsening in these domains listed, perhaps it has been poor for decades/centuries, and is slowly improving in fact, rather than further worsening?

6. Similarly, it is unclear what criteria were used to move from the evidence
presented on a problem to the research needs. For each section, the authors outline key evidence and features of the situation, and then present some research questions. How were these questions derived and prioritised? I do not agree with much of the first list of research priorities selected for HIV (HIV treatment access and promotion of safer sex practices, such as abstinence). The research needs in the final sentence of the HIV section make good sense to me, however, and appear to reflect the evidence presented.

7. In other places too, the evidence presented and the research questions prioritised do not match so neatly. For example, mental health of adolescents is often highlighted as a key research question (even in the final sentence of the paper), but little is presented about the prevalence of mental health disorders, and mental health conditions are not discussed in the presentation of evidence. It is not clear what mental health conditions are referred to here. Non-intentional and intentional injuries is also prioritised as a research question, but not discussed in detail.

8. Overall, the methods that the authors have used to make their paper is unclear: both the methods of locating, selecting and collating evidence presented, and then how this evidence is used to inform research questions. The article requires much more references, given the number of statements made in the paper, or a reduction in the number of claims made.

9. In a few other places, language is used too loosely for a scientific piece. The evidence is compelling, the arguments are clear, no need to overstate the issues, or to use imprecise language. In the HIV section, for example, we are told that youth are disproportionately affected by the pandemic and have heightened risks for HIV vulnerability and negative impact. These may well be 3 distinct domains, but that is not explained and the reader is left thinking that the case is being overstated somewhat.

10. Interestingly, very little is presented on gender differences in the outcomes reviewed, how girls and boys experiences differ in each of the outcomes reviewed. That may be beyond the scope of the paper, but some mention might be useful. Interestingly, the term “emasculated traditional structures of support” is used in the globalisation section. In this section, the authors mention the loss of traditional structures as a purely negative thing. Surely the loss of some harmful traditional practices is a good thing. The role of women in many of these traditional structures is very harmful, and there are tremendous gains for women (and for men) from diminishment of such traditional practices surely. I presume the authors are not suggesting that the emasculation of traditional cultures is a bad thing, please clarify?

11. The authors mainly focus on young people 10-24, but sometimes this appears unclear if this is the case. Saying about 40% of this group are out of school is interesting, but that might mean that 100% of youth 10-18 are in school, and most of those do not enter tertiary level training aged 19-24 making up the 40%. Sometimes it may be more appropriate to present data on a narrower age group within the 10-24 year band, and to be clear when this has been done.

Minor essential revisions
12. Try avoid split infinitives where possible, for example, the sentence: “Evidence on innovative approaches to increase access to basic education, address child labor, and to improve the quality of teaching particularly in resource-poor settings is needed.” Could much better be written “Evidence is needed on...”

13. Last sentence of page 3, does this refer to Estimates in Africa of the proportion of the population who live in slums, or are these more broad estimates.

14. The section on war and conflict has some language errors, please fix the third sentence of the 2nd paragraph of this section. Also a few lines below “combatants in any war in most of Africa are often” cannot be interpreted, a sentence cannot contain the words, any, most and often, and still make sense. “Alienated arm of youth” “all over Africa” also need clarification, seems more appropriate language for a lay piece.

15. In the section on lack of special services for youth, please explain what marital-status related barriers are. And provide more references for this section. Again here, I am not sure that research on “health-seeking behaviours for different types of symptoms” really reflects the issues listed above that in the evidence review section. The research questions here focus on demand side issues, while supply side concerns are raised mainly in the evidence section.

16. In many parts of Africa, the fertility rates in youth are dropping, this should be mentioned.

17. Give the date that the Pubmed search was done. Sufficient detail is needed to make work replicable. The database is called medline, pubmed is the search engine, please correct that where pubmed is mentioned in the paper.

18. Please provide some examples of the African journals that are referred to in the end of the discussion section. It would be interesting for the reader to see what kinds of publication are being referred to here.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

none of the above