Reviewer’s report

Title: Umbilical cord care in Ethiopia and implications for behavior change: a qualitative study

Version: 2
Date: 27 October 2013
Reviewer: Aslak Steinsbekk

Reviewer’s report:

A very well written paper, clear and straightforward.

I would suggest that the author can get more out of this paper by focusing more on the practices the informants reveal and how this can be utilised. As it is now I think that the focus of the result and discussion is mainly on what the author thinks is important. This means to my mind that the full potential of this well conducted study does not come across: the fact that there seems to be very good data on how the informants perceive the situation. To be concrete,
- the result section could emphasise even more on the rationale behind the informants’ actions.
- The discussion and conclusion should take as the starting point the rationale behind the informants’ actions and discuss and make recommendations from this.

To give a more concrete example. In the conclusion it is stated that “The study has found that local cord care practices involving cord tying and cutting and application of substances are likely to expose the newborn to infection.” This is “wrong” in the sense that this was not (cannot be) the result of qualitative study of this type. What was found was that the informants’ had a variety of reasons for different actions that potentially could lead to infection. This means that what I think is the potential of the paper could be better shown by rewriting the structure to something like:
- The main rationale behind the practices and importantly that this varies
- That behavior change messaging have to take this into account (as is stated, but make it more concrete)
- Further research is needed that more specifically targets those who have experienced / are involved in cases with cord infections (see comment below).

I have one concern regarding the connection between the revealed practice and infections. It is not documented that those interviewed had experienced infections. As there is no mention of this in the paper, it leads the reader to think that infection was not a problem “relevant” for the informants (only four had seen an infected cord). Thus it can be said that their practice was good as it did not lead to infections. I know that this is speculations, the point is to try to clarify that the author needs to say something about the informants exposure to infections /
death of new borne, make a connection between the informants practice and infection and make some discussion about whether or not it is likely that the different practices causes infections. I.e. not only refer to findings in the literature but to the actual situation concerning the informants.

Since so much emphasis is put on chlorohexidine some information is needed on whether or not the informants was asked in particular abut its use, and if not the reason why including a discussion of this as a limit.

Some specific comments
- In the Abstract / Methods the main question in the interview guide should be given
- In the Abstract / Results I think the whole paragraph should be rewritten to use more qualitative words and focus more on the reasons than on the actual practices.
- The first aim is a yes/no question, which should be avoided in qualitative studies and I don’t think tha author have data to answer it. I.e. delete it.
- The first use of the abbreviation HEW is not explained (last sentence under Study area).
- If there is some references to the formative research project, please provide it.
- Please provide an explanation of what a TBA and HEW are, what are their roles, background and place in the health care delivery.
- Where there no HEWs interviewed as no information on them is given in the table?
- Give the total N for each group in the table
- Please explain a bit more what is meant with “expanded notes”.
- Regarding the picture shown to the informants (red/infected cord), give some information about the reaction to those not having seen it.

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest 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:
I declare that I have no competing interests