Reviewer's report

Title: Syphilis screening in the antenatal care: a cross-sectional study from Botswana

Version: 1 Date: 7 May 2006

Reviewer: Saiqa Mullick

Reviewer's report:

General
The paper is clear that the prevalence of syphilis remains high and that operational difficulties exist but how these should be addressed is not articulated as clearly.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Editorial comments: Background section line 5 and line 8 remove the from before antenatal care.
Results section line 5 add the word weeks after 20.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
In the results it would be useful to include any data that the authors have on whether or not partners of infected women were treated particularly since reinfection rates are presented.

Limitations of the data sources and the study methods should be discussed in the discussion.

Discussion should include how generalizable are the results of the study how representative are the study clinics of other clinics in the country.

The current recommendation for syphilis screening and treatment and retesting in Botswana should be included in the background section. Also a description on the recommendation for partner treatment should be included.

The discussion of this paper could be strengthened considerably by including some discussion on the relevance of these prevalence findings for the clinics concerned and their broader relevance.

Discussion of why despite the operational difficulties mentioned syphilis rates from surveillance data have declined.

There is also some need for a discussion on why some of the operational difficulties exist. It is not clear in the methodology how the data was collected on identification of the operational difficulties yet this was outlined as an objective at the outset of the paper.

Some clear recommendations on how these should be addressed beyond increased commitment from stakeholders should be included. Are there any recommendations on what data could be collected routinely, strengthening routine data, consideration of other approaches to screening and treatment? The paper is clear that the prevalence of syphilis remains high and that operational difficulties exist but how these should be addressed is not articulated as clearly.

What next?: Accept after discretionary revisions
Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests