Reviewer’s report

Title: Does an effective monitoring system improve family-planning performance? An experience in rural Bangladesh

Version: 1 Date: 19 January 2007

Reviewer: Tara Kielmann

Reviewer’s report:

General

This article explores a potentially interesting topic. The subject area seeks to make an important contribution to the study of human resources and health. However in its current form, the study fails to address the complexities of its matter and tends to focus solely on the evaluation of an in-built monitoring system in improving family planning performance. The authors need to find a better way at voicing the originality of their findings and make better use of the literature available by contrasting and comparing theirs with previous work. In addition, the findings have been more or less stripped from their context and no information is given on the setting, the political, cultural, social and economic environment.

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

The methods section in this article needs a lot of work and clarifications.
A) It is mentioned that both qualitative and quantitative methods were used, however the precise methods are not outlined and their choice not explained
B) How were the observations undertaken
C) It would be good to have a better understanding the reasoning behind the interviewing guidelines that underlay the surveys – despite the fact that the authors mention that information on awareness of, accessibility to and use of, health and family planning services was collected from the MWRAs, there is no mention of the basis and background of the interviewing guidelines.
D) Mention is made of the meetings, however not on the logistical set up or the precise content
E) Very little information is given on the research staff and the field interviewers – their backgrounds, training and incentives
F) Reasons behind choice of using female interviewers are not given (linked to my point on lack of context).
G) There is no information on the family welfare assistants or the villages

The discussion and conclusion need to move away from a merely descriptive summary of the results and really critically deal with the matter at hand. How does this study contribute to the overall debate on monitoring systems in family planning? How did the dynamics between frontline workers and managerial staff pan out and ultimately lead to improvements of the programme; this issue is mentioned but not explored fully, which leaves the reader with a slightly unsatisfied feeling by the end of the conclusion.

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

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

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.