Author's response to reviews

Title: Working practices and incomes of health workers: evidence from an evaluation of a delivery fee exemption scheme in Ghana

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Working practices and incomes of health workers: evidence from an evaluation of a delivery fee exemption scheme in Ghana

We would like to thank both reviewers for their detailed and constructive comments, which we feel have led to a strengthened second draft. We respond to their comments below and detail the changes which have been made (which has, however, increased the length of the article, from under 5,000 to just under 7,000 words).

Reviewer 1

*General comment:* The reviewer is right that we are trying to do two things here: first, to indicate how the exemptions policy has affected HW workload and income (which was the reason for the commissioning of the survey) but also, secondly, to make use of the information generated by that survey to throw light on the general situation of health workers, which is of wider topical interest. We agree that the attribution of changes to the policy is not straightforward (see below), but believe that both topics are of interest. We have added some early signposts (e.g. in abstract) that the article has two aspects to it.

*Major compulsory changes:*
1. The need for a discussion of the potential biases in self-reporting is acknowledged. We have added a section on this at the start of the discussion.
2. Comparison with other sources (facility records; utilisation): These have been added to the discussion.
3. More description of questionnaire: We have added a clarification in the methods section. The questionnaire had closed questions, apart from two open-ended questions at the end.
4. TBA languages: this has been clarified: a shorter version was administered in the local languages to TBAs.
5. Analytic methods for open questions: We have explained at the end of the methods section how these were analysed.
6. More evidence on problems related to fees: we have added evidence based on a previous costing study and cited the utilisation responses found in our household survey.

*Minor changes:*

- Definitions:
  - Delivery fee exemption – have changed to this throughout text.
  - Focal districts – these are the same as sampled districts (they were the districts selected for implementing all of the different research components). We have clarified by removing the word ‘focal’.
  - Caseload: we asked about total clients and about deliveries. We have added a note in the discussion on the crude nature of the former as an indicator.
  - Lifetime risk: this has been deleted
Medical practitioners: this is used here to mean the same as skilled attendant, and has been changed accordingly and defined.

Policy and HW income: it is true that we have not clearly explained the hypotheses underlying the research (as to how the policy might have affected HWs). This has been remedied at the end of the introductory section (top p.3)

Definition of household. This was defined as including all those sleeping in the dwelling for at least three of the last 12 months, including children and adults. This has been added.

Definition of borrowing. No particular definition of borrowing was given to the respondents and indeed the responses to this section of questions on HH income are not seen as reliable. I have elaborated in a section on data limitations at the start of the discussion section.

Period of policy implementation: Yes, the policy was introduced 21 mths before in Central and 6 mths before in Volta, so the questions about changes over 2 years were intended to capture changes related to the introduction of the policy. We have added an explanation to this effect in the methods section.

Two sets of discussion of income: The first section is reporting household income and the second personal income of the respondent. We have changed the sub-headings to make the distinction clearer.

TBAs and scheme incentives: TBAs were not supposed to be included, according to national guidelines, but one district decided to include them in the scheme. This has been explained in the methods section, and we have added a footnote on this on page 4.

Reviewer 2

Point 1 (more systematic figures on key variables, and links to exemptions policy): this has been added in tables 1 and 3, trying to track the key indicators which may be linked to the policy’s impact

Point 2: title misleading: we have altered the title slightly and have also attempted to indicate more clearly in the text why the scheme could be expected to affect health workers (not through their main salaries, as the reviewer indicates, but via other channels)

Other changes

Some additional references have been added and some changes made to the discussion section.