Reviewer's report

Title: Availability and components of maternity services according to providers and users perspectives in North Gondar, Northwest Ethiopia

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Reviewer: Marion Koso-Thomas

Reviewer's report:

Authors: Abebaw G Worku, Alemayehu W Yalew and Mesganaw F Afework
Title: Availability and components of maternity services according to providers and users perspectives in North Gondar, Northwest Ethiopia
Journal: Reproductive Health
Reviewer: Dr Marion Koso-Thomas, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (kosomari@mail.nih.gov)

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?

The authors are attempting to describe availability of maternal services which is not a new topic. Definition of a question posed is not applicable.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?

The survey was modified from a sampling manual but the details are not well described or developed. The authors should consider including an example(s) of the exact tool/method that was used in this study. This does not allow for replication of the work.

3. Is the data sound and well controlled?

The facility and population-based survey seem to have been extensive. Unclear how the functional capacity was assessed.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

Somewhat, it seems that the tables could be consolidated.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

In my opinion, not sufficiently.

6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?

The title suggests that an analysis of the availability of maternal care services was conducted. However, the issue of the availability of individual components of this care was also included. The use of the word ‘And’ components does make the reader somewhat confused. The manuscript
describes the availability ‘of’ components of maternity services which is a different context and has different implications for the discussion and conclusion.

7. Is the writing acceptable?
Average. The authors can improve on grammar and writing style.

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

The authors need to clearly define the goal of the survey. They report the availability of maternal health services as being important for maternal survival but in actuality, the provision of signal functions are more relevant than antenatal care. They may consider redoing the paper with the objective of describing signal functions and write a different manuscript on general maternity services. Table 1 describes the availability of basic and comprehensive obstetric care and I suggest the rest of the paper should reflect that.

There is no table or figure that shows the linked facility population-based data. Tables and 3 and 5 are not sufficient for that purpose.

The authors do not seem to have utilized the manual appropriately to determine the methodology for this type of survey. I recommend that they revisit the manual and improve on the design of the analysis. If they feel they have done this adequately, they need to describe which of the approaches outlined by the manual, they used.

They used the perspective of health users and health providers which in and of itself is acceptable but the results and conclusions need to be reported cautiously. Tables that do not seem relevant (Table 4) and tables that can be truncated (Tables 3 and 5) will allow for more space to include these. There appears to be a 2 fold question being asked and the manuscript should be structured as such.

• The issue of the availability of the components with the population-based link

• The description of the type of service (essential vs. basic vs. comprehensive)

The survey cannot be used to measure functioning based on the data collected. The authors need to clarify otherwise delete this statement. Subjective interviews on training and skills does not infer adequate quality of care.

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

There should be consistency in the terminology used. Table 5 is titled Essential Services whereas the text describes antenatal care, postnatal care, basic care and the like. What does the author consider to be essential care and is this based on health policy or Ministry of Health definitions by the Ethiopian government? What is the standard being used to define these as “essential services? I am unclear what the term “skilled maternal care “is. Also inconsistent use in the tables – doctor, health officer, midwife / nurse. How would the health user be able to differentiate?
There is mention of health officers but is unclear what category of health provider this is. The authors need to include a description of their qualifications or skill.

The author used population based survey that included women with births in the last year although the methodology in the manual and the author’s text recommends concurrent surveys. What was the rationale for using skilled antenatal care and delivery care as opposed to pregnancy and immediate post-partum in January to March of 2012 for your sample? It appears that an unnecessary recall bias was introduced.

There are several statements (paragraph 4 and 5 of the background) that are not referenced properly.

The second paragraph of the results section is unclear with regards to the percentages reported. Are these the percentage of equipment or facilities with missing equipment?

- Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)

**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:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I have no competing interests