Author's response to reviews

Title: Reproductive health decision making among Ghanaian Women

Authors:

Eugene K.M. Darteh (eugenedarteh@gmail.com)
David Teye Doku (dokudavid@gmail.com)
Kobina Esia-Donkoh (braabrother@yahoo.co.uk)

Version: 2 Date: 22 January 2014

Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Editor,

SUBMISSION OF REVISED MANUSCRIPT MS: 4970785051031429 - Reproductive health decision making among Ghanaian Women

I write to submit our revised manuscript for your consideration and publication. Below are the revision and discussion of the reviewers’ comments and suggestion. We have also revised the entire manuscript for typo errors. We are sure that the manuscript has improved and look forward to your acceptance for publications.

Yours faithfully,

Eugene Kofuor Maafo Darteh
eugenedarteh@gmail.com
Responses to reviewer 1

1) p. 4 – The first paragraph states: “Women’s decision making has consistently gained a centre stage in global agenda...”; however, the authors do not describe why it is such an important topic. The authors need to present prior research that shows that decision making associated with sexual and reproductive health (SRH) in sub-Saharan Africa.

Response: We have provided additional information on the importance of the study and studies from the sub-region

2) p. 4 – The second paragraph does not provide new information to build the argument that decision making is important to SRH and, therefore, does not need to be included.

Response: We have deleted the second paragraph as suggested.

3) p. 4 – The authors state that this paper “examines the predictors of women’s decision making in sexual and reproduction health issues without focusing on gender or any relations.” This ignores a large part of the SRH literature that shows that gender relations are critical to SRH decisions. Ignoring gender relations is a major weakness of this study.

Response: We agree with the reviewer however, the data we used did not allow us to explore gender relations as such we have acknowledged this as a limitation of our paper

4) p. 5 – The authors state: “These are decision making as a process [5], as a choice [2], and as a right [6]”, yet they only describe decision making as a process and do not describe the other two mechanisms.

Response: We have added a description of the two other mechanisms (choice and right).

5) p. 5 – The authors state: “By extension, woman’s decision making about her sexual and reproductive health will be effectively accomplished based on her exposure to knowledge.” Again, this statement ignores the importance of the social and cultural environment in the decision making process. This is a major
omission in the Introduction of this paper.

Response: We have added the importance of social and cultural environments in decision making.

6) p. 5 – The authors state: “Women’s decisions about their sexual and reproductive health in Ghana and Africa have scarcely discussed or studied.” This is not true. The authors need to do a much more extensive literature search on SRH in Ghana and other sub-Saharan African countries to learn more about this issue.

Response: We have deleted the statement that ‘…have been scarcely discussed …’, and have added literature on previous studies on the subject

7) Overall, the Introduction needs to make a much stronger argument for why decision making is important to the use of reproductive health services, including social relationships and other social and cultural factors.

Response: We have improved on the introduction by re-organising it and adding additional literature

Methods

1) p. 6 – The authors state: “These responses were re-coded into dichotomous variables [No and Don’t Know=0 and Yes=1].” There is a very big difference between a woman reporting “No” and “Don’t Know” when asked questions about sexual behavior and this dichotomization ignores this difference.

Response: We agree with the reviewer that there are differences in don’t know and No. However, because a handful of respondents answered “don’t know” the analysis with or without the category did not change the result hence we have maintained the two categories.

2) p. 6 – The authors state: “The choice of logistic regression rests on the fact that it allows us to estimate equations for both continuous and categorical explanatory variables in one equation.” This is not accurate. Logistic regression models are used to predict (or explain) binary dependent (or outcome) variable.

Response: We agree with the reviewer and we have revised that section for clarity

3) There needs to be a more accurate description of the explanatory variables used in
the models and why each variable was chosen. In addition, the authors need to
describe the analytic strategy in more detail, including specification tests and
sensitivity analyses.

Response: We have described the variables as well as the analytical strategy in more
details.

4) Age, wealth status, and possibly education should be used as continuous variables in
the regression models. The authors will lose information by dividing variables into
categories; therefore, the authors should avoid doing this unless they absolutely need to.

Response: The categorization of these variables was data driven. The distribution of age
varied greatly and the wealth status has already been categorised in the data.

4) Some of the explanatory variables may be highly correlated (e.g., place of
residence and region) and the authors need to address why each variable was
included in the final regression models.

Response: We agree with the reviewer that there is the possibility of some
explanatory variables could be correlated however after running a correlation for
the explanatory variables, we found out that these variables were weakly correlated.
We have mentioned this in the methodology section of the paper for clarity.

Results

1) I assume that the logistic regression models are multivariate and not bivariate. The
authors need to state this and describe how the two differ.

Response: We based on the other reviewer's suggestion; we have used both
multivariate and bivariate models. We have now clearly stated this.

Discussion

1) The authors need to provide additional support to the claims they make about
their findings from previously published literature. For example, on p. 13 they
state, “the age differences between husbands and wives is usually such that the
woman is almost always younger than the man and sometimes the differences in
age between couples run into decades. This cultural phenomenon may prevent
women from negotiating for sexual intercourse or the use of condoms and other
contraceptives.” Where is the support for this explanation from the literature?

Response: We have revised the discussion section and have added reference to
support the age mixing cultural practices.
2) p. 15 – The authors state: “Furthermore, the scarce literature on the subject did not allow for a comprehensive comparison of our finding with other studies.” The authors need to do a more extensive literature search to find relevant literature on this topic from sub-Saharan Africa. If they do not have access to this literature, perhaps they could partner with an academic institution to get access to more literature.

Response: We have revised the discussion section and have added literature and hence deleted the phrase that scarce literature restricted comparison.

3) p. 15
4) – The authors state: “The finding suggests that interventions and policies geared at empowering women to take charge of their reproductive health should focus particularly on women from less wealthy backgrounds and those with low educational attainments.” You cannot make this claim because of the stated limitation that the association is not causal.

Response: In our perspective the recommendation was deduced from the finding here reported. We are not sure that our recommendation implies causal inference. For this reason we have maintained that section of the report.

Minor Essential Revisions
1) p. 4 – “millennium development goals” should be capitalized

Response: Done as suggested.

2) p. 4 – The term “‘(em) powered’” does not make sense the way it is presented. The authors need to define why they place this term in quotes and why they use the prefix “em” parenthetically.

Response: Done as suggested.

3) p. 6 – The authors need to describe why they used the term “discrete choice model”.

Response: Done as suggested.

5) p. 14 – The authors state: “Regional differences exist in Ghana by level of education, development and poverty (DHS 2008).” However, these variables were controlled for in the regression models. So, this is not an accurate interpretation of the regional differences.

Response: Done as suggested.
6) p. 15 – The authors state: “Wealth in its self represents power.” How do you know this? Please explain what you mean and provide evidence that supports this. Also, are there other indicators that the authors could use to represent power relations? For example, the authors could use household decision making questions that are common to most DHS surveys.

Response: The statement “Wealth in its self represents power” speculative rather than a fact. We have revised this to read “Wealth in its self may represent power” to reflect the speculative intention of the phrase.

The authors would like to thank reviewers for their useful comments.
Responses to reviewer 2

1. Tables 2 & 3 need to be revised to include the actual numbers per responses - Yes or No, and the accompanying the percentages. Without these it is not possible to determine (without reference to the text) the direction of the associations presented in the tables.

Response: The actual numbers are indicated in table 1 hence there is no need to indicate them in tables 2 & 3. For sexual intercourse – the total was 2950: Yes-78.9; No-18.6 and not sure - 2.5. for condom use the total was 2950: Yes 70.2; No – 25.3 and not sure 4.5

1. The authors appear to zoom straight into multivariate analysis using logistic regression. The conventional approach is to explore variables in bivariate analysis and by stated criteria explore further using multivariate analysis. This approach makes it possible to better explain the observed associations in the final logistic regression model. Would the author consider showing the results of univariate analysis, or indicate why they depart from this approach?

Response: The changes have been effected. We have added the univariate analysis

2. In setting the stage for the study (INTRODUCTION), the author need to address the practical relevance of the topic they explore. The theoretical concepts underlining the issues of women’s decision-making should be situated in practical terms. E.g. prevention of STI and unwanted pregnancies

Response: The introduction has been improved with the addition of current literature and has also been improved upon

3. Although the authors make a point about how this work departs from the status quo, it is not clear how it in reality does. Could the authors be clearer on this?

Response: The statement ‘… departs from status quo’ has been deleted for clarity.

4. On page 6, the statement is made that “The choice of logistic regression rests on the fact that it allows us to estimate equations for both continuous and categorical explanatory variables in one equation”.
I suggest the word continuous variable should be dropped in this case since none of the variable explored in this study was continuous. Left as it is, it could be misleading. In principle, unless categorized, logistic regression will not be the most approach in the case of continuous variables

*Response: continuous variable has been dropped as suggested.*

The authors would like to thank the reviewers for their useful comments.