Reviewer's report

Title: Reproductive health decision making among Ghanaian Women

Version: 1 Date: 7 August 2013

Reviewer: William Story

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Major Compulsory Revisions

Introduction
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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.
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.

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.

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.

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.

5) 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.

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.

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?

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.

3) p. 15 – 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.

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

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.

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

4) 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.

5) 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.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

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.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.