Reviewer's report

Title: Programme Reporting Standards (PRS) for improving the reporting of sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health programmes

Version: 0 Date: 25 Apr 2017

Reviewer: Jessica Gleason

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For this paper, the authors describe their process in developing a standardized reporting tool (the PRS) to be used by programs in the field of sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent health (SRMNCAH). Overall, this is a valuable contribution to the field, in that it aims to increase complete and accurate reporting, and to provide a cultural and environmental context to reporting, which may be missed in traditional academic journals. The authors do an excellent job of providing support for the necessity of this tool in their introduction. The primary source of program descriptions and results are often academic journals. Between publication bias and the limitations on length and content of articles, journals may be unsuited to fully describe the "lessons learned" and cultural context of programs that could facilitate replication/adaptation of program. To ensure clarity, there are a few issues that should be addressed:

1) The methods of the authors' Delphi process could be explained in a bit more detail. Supplemental File 2 provides a better description of this process, including the n for each round, and a better account of round 3, which was a bit unclear in the manuscript. The additional files are a good inclusion, but the reader should be able to understand the process from the methods section alone. On line 159, in the description of Rounds 1 and 2, the authors mention that participants received a "revised checklist," but there is no mention of a checklist previously. In the description of Round 3 (on line 166), it is mentioned that all items were categorized--it could be made clear at this point that none of the items were ranked as "not important." Otherwise, this line makes it seems like non-important items were included as "supplementary" items. It may also make sense to move the quantitative/qualitative analyses of items sections before the Round 3 section. Then, when describing how they quantitatively categorized "not important," the authors could mention that no items fell into that category.

2) It would be helpful to mention in the methods how participants were identified for inclusion in the technical consultation. They are labeled as "participants," but it seems like they could be called additional experts who were identified to participate in this portion. It also seems important to address why so few individuals from the original Delphi panel were included in the technical consultation. Moreover, the authors'
description of a Delphi technique to reach consensus seems a bit misleading, since there were two separate processes to reach what could be considered two separate consensuses (Delphi and technical consultation). These two separate processes should be made clearer, since they seem to be lumped together as part of the Delphi process. Furthermore, if the authors identified questions as supplementary through Delphi, and found in the pilot that people had difficulty reporting, maybe there should be optional supplementary questions to reduce reporting burden. Ultimately, it seems important to discuss the rationale behind including all 47 items (albeit condensed), both "essential" and "supplementary."

In lines 204-206, the final version was sent to the technical consultants for review, but not the original Delphi panel. It would be good to briefly mention why the original panel was not asked to comment further (e.g., their role was simply to identify essential items).

On line 283, the authors mention "suggesting new items" in the technical consultation--it should be clear whether new items were included that did not go through the Delphi panel.

3) Under Participant Characteristics, the numbers don't add to 100% for organization or region, when the wording suggests they should.

4) The authors' description of the pilot program mentions the length of time it took individuals to complete the PRS, yet none of the questions were excluded. Was this because all of the questions were generally completed? Perhaps a sentence on the choice to keep all items would be beneficial (to reiterate from above).

5) The Program Overview narrative section does not seem to add much information that cannot be directly taken from Table 4. It would make sense to provide a brief summary of each section, with clarifying points, as needed, but I do not see the benefit of repeating what is already apparent in Table 4 (i.e., each item).

6) With regard to the discussion, I think it is important to provide a more concrete account of the potential uses for this tool. As a reader, I would like to know why programs would choose to use this tool over another, especially if they've used a design-based reporting tool in the past? Could there be incentives? What is the intended audience of this reporting system, and how will it be accessed (e.g., will there be a central reporting location, who gets access, and how might others access these reports to inform their own
program design)? Essentially, how will this system help close the "gap between research and practice," and how will it help apply "lessons learned," both mentioned in the introduction?

On line 439 in the discussion, the authors mention their intent that the PRS would be used prospectively. This makes sense, given how difficult it seemed to be for some program assistants to locate the documentation needed during piloting. This should be included as a limitation— that you didn't necessarily have time to pilot the PRS prospectively, and implementing a retrospective pilot does not necessarily allow you to fully envision its real world utility, or other problems that could be addressed prior to launch. Another pilot is mentioned in supplemental documentation, and the authors may want to mention that as a next step, if that is their plan.

7) Table 1: There are inconsistencies (dashes and blanks used interchangeably). Under Round 3, they have 20 reported here and 21 in the text. For the "not specified" category I would expect numbers to decrease—if somebody previously reported organization in the first round, but not in subsequent, this should be clarified by a footnote. Otherwise, why couldn't organization or region be imputed from the previous survey? If experts reported anonymously during the Delphi process, this should be mentioned in the text.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
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Yes

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