Reviewer’s report

**Title:** Determinants and contextual influences on the use of skilled birth attendants at delivery in Makueni County, Kenya: a cross sectional study

**Version:** 2  **Date:** 19 March 2014

**Reviewer:** Lawrence Ikamari

**Reviewer’s report:**

The article used good data. It is well written and findings can be easily be utilized. I recommend that the article be accepted for publication subject to the following corrections/clarifications.

**Major compulsory revision**

1. **Title:** The title is rather confusing since the term determinants encompasses contextual influences. In addition, it is not clear in the article which of the explanatory variables as considered as determinants and which one are contextual. In order to remove the ambiguity, I propose the title be changed to ‘Determinants of use of skilled birth attendant at delivery in Makueni: A cross sectional study’.

2. **Research problem:** Although the article has indicated the purpose of the study, no research problem has been stated in the article. Usually research problems are represented by research gaps as revealed by a review of pertinent and relevant literature. In this regard, a brief review of the determinants of utilization of skilled delivery services in Kenya or in places with similar socio-economic characteristics as Makueni county would have been useful in established the research problem for this study. I strongly recommend that the research problem be provided for the study.

3. **Choice of explanatory variables:** It is not clear what guided the selection of the explanatory variables that are included in the study since no mention has been made of this in the article. Typically the choice of explanatory variables is informed by a careful review of relevant and pertinent literature so that only those variables that have found to have statistically significant effects are selected for inclusion in the study.

4. **No description and measurement of the explanatory variables.**

These should have been provided in the data processing and analysis section to guide the reader. Currently the reader has to guess on how these were measured by looking at tables containing the results.

5. **Use of modern family planning methods**

There are two issues that need to be clarified with the use of this variable. First this is a current status variable and thus it does not refer to the time preceding the pregnancy in question (that is the pregnancy that either delivered by a skilled
attendant or by somebody else). Some of the women (mothers) who reported current use of modern family planning at the time of the survey may have initiated it only recently that after they had delivered the pregnancy in question. So what is the justification for using this variable as an explanatory variable of use of skilled delivery attendants?

The second issue relates to the use this variable in Table 6 as a measure of access to reproductive health services. It is assumed that women who did not use modern family planning have no access to reproductive health services. This is rather simplistic since reproductive health services include antenatal care and skilled attendance at delivery as well. Some of the women who did not use family planning may have attended the ANC clinics and some of them may have been delivered by skilled attendants indicating that they had access to reproductive health services. Further some of the women who may have had financial ability or lived near a family planning service outlets may not have practiced family planning simply because they had no demand for it or faced other barriers and not because they lacked access. In this study all these issues and the fact that the variable denoting use of family planning methods is a current status variable should need to discussed in relation to the use of this variable as a proxy for access to reproductive health services and in the interpretation of the results.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**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