Reviewer's report

Title: Community based public health interventions to improve reproductive health for young married couples in resource-constrained settings: A systematic review

Version: 2 Date: 30 September 2014

Reviewer: Kathleen Deering

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Sarkar et al BMCPH

Overall, the authors have undertaken an interesting study that looks at a key under-researched area of reproductive health relating to community-based interventions and their impact on key reproductive health outcomes. The literature review is well-designed and well-documented. There are some areas of the paper that could be improved or expanded on, which I have detailed below.

Minor

1. Paper should be double-spaced.
2. Please make sure there are always spaces after periods (e.g., line 216), spaces between words (e.g., line 297), etc..
3. Please check the language throughout for grammar. I will give examples in the abstract of where grammar could be improved, but please check throughout the paper:
   a. Line 50: add hyphen after “low”
   b. Line 51: change to “among the younger age group”
   c. Line 54: change to “for young married women in LMIC.”
   d. Line 57: change to “initiatives at the community level”
   e. Line 62/63: “the capacity of health workers/systems”
   f. Line 67: change to “community-based”
   g. Line 70: change to “high-quality”
   h. Line 72: change to “the effect on improved reproductive health”

Major

1. The acronyms used to identify each of the studies end up being confusing to read. Suggest you use the author/date (e.g., Smith et al 2014) where necessary. E.g., line 213 – not necessary
2. Not necessary to add “(when appropriate)” after “safe abortion services” (e.g., line 149)
3. Missing in the Introduction is context about why the authors are looking at community-based interventions – clarify for the reader what a community-based intervention is, why they are looking at community-based interventions and their effect on reproductive health – moreover, since the study seems to be focused on reproductive health access rather than reproductive health, this should be clarified in the title and the introduction. If it is both (it is a bit unclear), this should be clarified (e.g., reproductive health and health access).

4. Description of the larger sample of studies in terms of their geographic locations (Line 183-187) is repetitive with the following paragraph and should be deleted to avoid repetition.

5. Please clarify what is mean in line 355: “(in the projects- we reviewed)”

6. The Discussion in general needs more nuanced citation and interpretation of study results. Line 372 – The authors state “Given our understanding…” – this understanding is not shared by all or potentially even most readers. There remains a lot of research that explains health behaviours primarily on an individual level. The authors have a great opportunity here to give some background on the success of community-based studies in other fields because of their integration of effects from multiple different levels of influence, explaining their own results in the context of this broader literature. While this review has shown that there is not much data on the effect of community-based studies on reproductive health access among a limited population, there is a broader literature on community-based studies and their effectiveness in connecting vulnerable populations with care.

7. Given the limitations of this review, since few studies were able to be included and those available were primarily not in peer-reviewed papers, authors should include a summary of what the review can tell us (in the context of the limitations) in the conclusions (since this is what most people will read). E.g., adding a sentence in the conclusion of the paper and the abstract to say who the results of the review best pertain to (i.e., geographic location) and the general limitations of the data quality. It would also be helpful to have a summary of the total number of outcomes measuring reproductive health access assessed across all papers in Table 3b and the quality as summarized in Table 4.

8. In the limitations of the review, please clarify which key outcomes were missing – i.e., key outcomes that would help fill in gaps about reproductive health and health access of the intended population of interest.

9. Perhaps I am missing something, but in the Conclusions, the authors state “Our review suggests that community based public health interventions targeting young married couples, their immediate family members, community members and health service providers contribute positively to improving access and utilization of reproductive health services and reducing maternal and neonatal mortality in resource-constrained settings of low and middle-income countries.” But I don’t seen in Table 3a/3b where the mortality outcomes are – it seems like the review includes studies that primarily look at access. Authors need to revise here and elsewhere to really give a good idea of what their review can tell readers and be wary of overstating results. As in 6, I would reframe the
conclusions in the Abstract/Discussion to be more cautious about what this relatively small review can tell other researchers.

**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:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests