Reviewer’s report

Title: Gender differentials in readiness and use of mHealth services in a rural area of Bangladesh

Version: 0 Date: 28 Apr 2017

Reviewer: Neda Ratanawongsa

Reviewer's report:

The authors use cross-sectional survey data to analyze gender disparities in ownership and use of mobile phones and knowledge of mHealth services in rural Bangladesh. The authors articulate the rationale for the study and describe the methods and results clearly. The findings add to the international literature about disparities in mHealth uptake related to gender, education, and SES. Suggestions for enhancing the manuscript follow.

Methods:

- The authors should include additional information about the method for data collection. Although the other reference is mentioned, it would be helpful to include just a few more details about the field collection.

- On p5, the authors should include more detail about the HealthLine 789 and Upazila Health Complex services and cost. Knowledge of a service may spread more rapidly with high utility and low barriers to use, and the authors need detail about these services - particularly since it appears HealthLine 789 has for-profit sponsorship - to understand whether women would find the services useful or accessible.

Statistical analysis, Results, and Tables

- The authors present a large amount of data and multiple analyses for each of 4 questions (ownership of mobile phones, technological "capabilities" of mobile phone owners, awareness of use of mobile phone for healthcare, knowledge of HealthLine 789, Knowledge of government mHealth services, and intention to use mHealth services in the future) For the readers, I might recommend focusing on the adjusted analyses, moving the univariate results to an Appendix. This would allow the readers to focus on the main findings. The figures offer an easier way to view the Table results, so another option would be to convert some of the Table data into bar charts.
- The Tables and Figures should have additional detail added to the titles to allow them to stand alone ("...in a household survey in rural Bangladesh")

- The authors should attend subheadings for the results or add paragraph breaks to help readers parse the 6 key result sections.

Discussion

- On p21 1st paragraph, the authors suggest "one option is to create a mechanism for men to share their phones with female family members" and then "Involving the male for maternal and child healthcare could be a possible solution for increasing female participation in mHealth-based healthcare services." This seems to simplify the barriers to mHealth use to one of access and knowledge. In particular, the suggestion to share one device for accessing potentially sensitive health services raises concerns about the privacy and confidentiality of health data and healthcare utilization by women in the household. The authors should consider other strategies that would permit safe, private, confidential access to mHealth among women, independent of relationships with men.

- On a similar note, the authors should consider whether it is not simply access to mobile phone and knowledge, but also the design of the health IT / mHealth platform and available services which should be reconsidered in bridging the gender, education, SES gaps. Even if every women had a phone and knew about the service, this would not ensure that the services were medically and culturally tailored to deliver the care needed by low-income women in rural Bangladesh. So, the technology is simply the gateway to the larger intervention, and for this to be successful, stakeholder engagement is needed at all stages of intervention development to ensure appropriate uptake of mHealth facilitated services. (Example: https://implementationscience.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13012-016-0426-2)
Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

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?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

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