Author’s response to reviews

Title: Factors Influencing Mothers’ Health Care Seeking Behaviour for Their Children: Evidence from 31 Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa

Authors:

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Author’s response to reviews:

Technical Comments:

Editor Comments:
In addition to the referee comments, please address the following essential editorial points:

1. STROBE guidelines. In accordance with BioMed Central editorial policies (http://www.biomedcentral.com/submissions/editorial-policies#standards+of+reporting), could you please ensure your manuscript reporting adheres to STROBE guidelines (http://www.strobe-statement.org/) for reporting observational research. This is so your methodology can be fully evaluated and utilised. Can you please include a completed STROBE checklist as an additional file when submitting your revised manuscript?
Response: The STROBE check list is attached

2. Control for Country in your analysis
Response: Country was controlled for in the analysis. The data for the analysis were obtained by pooling data sets from 31 countries. At the point of pooling the data sets, weighting factor was applied to data of each country. This was done in order to control for the effects of under and over enumeration. In the pooled data set, country has been controlled for.

Reviewer reports:
Reviewer 1: This study examined factors influencing mother's health-seeking behaviour for their children in sub-Saharan Africa. Even though this study is clearly written, I am at a loss on the contribution of this paper and the rationale for treating SSA as monolithic. The recommendation made is for who in particular? Who governs SSA and who needs to implement such intervention? In other words, who are the main audience or end-users of this study. While multi-country analysis is good, the analysis of data in this study in no way helps to understand the topic in SSA. Multi-country analysis helps in particular for cross country comparison, thereby aiding advocacy efforts. But the authors did not report results for any country in particular. SSA does not have one government that implements health intervention, and the
results of this study have no practical use. If this study were done by people that have never been to Africa and consider Africa as a country, it would be understandable.

Response: While thanking the reviewer for reviewing our manuscript, we would like to state that we disagree with some of the comments raised. The purpose of the paper was stated in the last part of background. The study examined the factors influencing mothers’ health-seeking behaviour for their children during illness in sub-Saharan Africa as a whole. Reviewer seems to be uncomfortable with our pooling data of countries together to have a single data set for sub-Saharan Africa. We would like to state that this is not the first multi-country study in which data of many countries would be pooled together to have a single data set. There are many studies that have used pooled data sets in sub-Saharan Africa. The focus of our study is to have a single data set for sub-Saharan Africa which is different from using data for each country and then compare the results. More so, we would like to express our displeasure with some of the comments of the reviewer which are condescending and derogatory. For instance, statements like “if this study were done by people that have never been to Africa, and consider Africa as a country, it would be understandable” are unnecessary and reviewer would have made his points in a more professional way.

Other minor issues

Categorizing mothers age should allow for understanding the behaviours of adolescent mothers, who are known to have poor outcomes, it should start from 15-19 years and so forth.

The sample inclusion was not explained. How many people were included in the survey? How many very removed from the datasets and why? The inclusion and exclusion criteria need to be clearly stated.

Response: Our choice of age categories is based on previous studies and the fact that the proportions of women age 15-19 who have had children are small.

Authors did not adequately justify the need for this study and what new insights to learn from reading this paper. What gaps is this study filling? What are the contributions of this paper? Why you people read this paper? What is new information is this paper reporting? We know about the factors found to be associated with the mother's health-seeking behaviours already.

Response: With respect to the justification for this study, this has been addressed in the background section of the paper. We did not include health insurance because most of the participants are not covered by health insurance. Also, distance to health facility was not included because we selected the variables based on previous studies.

Overall, I do not support the publication of this paper because of the flaws in the analysis. The averages reported for SSA mask the within and between countries inequalities that exist in the context. The study in no way inform readers of countries that implemented working policies that other countries within the region could follow.

Response: We have stated this earlier that our study is a multi-country study that used pooled data set. The study is not comparing countries but examining factors that influence mothers’ health-seeking behaviour for children in sub-Saharan Africa as a whole.
Reviewer 2:
The manuscript covers an important topic and area. However, it is poorly written and organized. For example, you don’t have to say children of women—you can just say children.
Response: Thank you for the comments. We have adjusted the interpretation as suggested, except where the mothers’ characteristics are involved.

Also, you don’t have to talk about Integrated Management of Childhood Illness in the introduction in details as its not the focus of the study.
Response: We have removed some of the statements as suggested

The methods section is not adequately described. You mentioned that 31 countries constitute Sub-Saharan Africa which is not true.
Response: We have revised this to read “in sub-Saharan Africa”

Description of data collection instruments was poorly done.
Response: We have included more information in the data collection procedure

In the outcome variable section, authors are mixing up words such categorized and defined. Authors did not also state that Table 1 captures information on demographic data of mothers.
The manuscript needs a native speaker editing or someone who writes better.
Response: We have addressed the comment on outcome variable by using “categorized” all through. Information about Table 1 has been included. We have tried to improve the grammatical content of the manuscript.