Reviewer’s report

Title: Community-based surveillance of unaccompanied and separated children in drought-affected northern Ethiopia

Version: 1 Date: 05 Nov 2018

Reviewer: Reviewer 2

Reviewer's report:

PEER REVIEWER ASSESSMENTS:

OBJECTIVE - Full research articles: is there a clear objective that addresses a testable research question(s) (brief or other article types: is there a clear objective)?

No - there are major issues

DESIGN - Is the current approach (including controls and analysis protocols) appropriate for the objective?

No - there are major issues

EXECUTION - Are the experiments and analyses performed with technical rigor to allow confidence in the results?

No - there are major issues

INTERPRETATION - Is the current interpretation/discussion of the results reasonable and not overstated?

No - there are major issues

OVERALL MANUSCRIPT POTENTIAL - Could an appropriately REVISED version of this work represent a technically sound contribution?

Maybe - with major revisions
PEER REVIEWER COMMENTS:

GENERAL COMMENTS: This manuscript reported the results of a pilot study that aimed to assess the feasibility of a community-based surveillance system. The authors described the surveillance system well. However, The primary aim of this study is to assess the feasibility of the system, the authors did not explicitly report how all aspects of the feasibility, namely technical feasibility, economic feasibility, legal feasibility and operational feasibility, were assessed. Some details of the methods should be provided. Need more discussion/interpretation of the main findings of feasibility. The findings need to be interpreted more accurately.

REQUESTED REVISIONS:

1. Abstract: should provide more information about the methods and results on the feasibility of the study that support the conclusions you made. Findings about the distributions of the age, sex of the children and reasons of separation are not key findings.

2. Introduction: The aims of this study should be stated explicitly. "This manuscript presents the findings …" is not a good statement of the aim.

3. Methods:
   - There was a lack of details on the methods used for the 'in-depth interviews' that is a key component of this study. What are the questions/prompts/guides used in the interviews? Personal characteristics of the interviewer? Relationship with participants? Where were the interviews conducted? Audio recording? Number of data coders?
   - Why was the Project Coordinator not interviewed? This person played a key role in the project and had a lot of insight knowledge.
   - The characteristics of separated children should not be the main outcomes because those would not related to the feasibility of the system.
   - More analyses of 'Focal point performance' should be performed. 'Correct messages' is one aspect of focal point's performance. That is not enough information to conclude about their performance and to make comparisons among sub-groups.
   - No information about statistical tests was provided.

4. Results:
Some p-values were not significant (>=0.05), but were interpreted as statistically significant.

Details of the distribution of the overall satisfaction ratings should be presented.

Too few qualitative data/sub-themes were presented that raises concerns about the quality of the in-depth interviews.

No quotations presented for 'negative experiences', 'be compensated financially'

Any adverse events for focal points?

5. Discussion:

The first paragraph should summarize and discuss the most important findings. The characteristics of the children are not, but the findings on the feasibility are.

As mentioned above, 'Correct messages' would not be interpreted as the whole performance of focal points. Therefore, the conclusions in the second paragraph of the discussion section should be moderated.

There is no data in the Results section related to the fourth paragraph. That kind of data is related to the technical feasibility that needs to be reported systematically.

'Limitations': should be separated for the limitations of the study and the limitations of the surveillance system.

Note: This reviewer report can be downloaded - see attached pdf file.

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.

No
Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

No

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

Declaration of competing interests
Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

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