Author’s response to reviews

Title: The effect of a community health worker intervention on public satisfaction: evidence from an unregistered outcome in a cluster-randomized controlled trial in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

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Dear Reviewers and Human Resources for Health Editor,

Thank you for taking the time to review our revisions. We appreciate your comments and have made edits (in track changes) directly to the manuscript and responded to each of your individual points below. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to us.

Best wishes,

Elysia Larson

Point-by-point response to reviewer comments:

Reviewer #1: Dear authors, Thank you for your review and clarifications. They have substantially improved the paper though more clarity is needed to bring the conclusion home to the reader.

Note that in the abstract and some sections of the paper, you still refer occasionally to 'public sector' health system. Please check.

Response: Thank you for asking us to check, it is an important point to make sure we get right. We have checked all places where we refer to ‘public sector’ health system. Because one of the questions analyzed specifically asked about the public health system, we have maintained this language throughout. We have been careful to define the population as “among women who are pregnant or recently delivered (see line 49 in the abstract and the definition in the background on lines 94-96).” We have confirmed that every instance where we use ‘public-sector’ that it accurately refers to the question that women responded to in which this language was used.

Having made it clear that the target group was pregnant women or recently delivered women, and bearing in mind the kind of health services they would require, it could be implicitly interpreted before the onset of the study that the intervention group would express better satisfaction with the CHWs and the public system than the control group. If possible, it will be great to provide extra clarity between the control and the intervention by providing details (in terms of the kind of services that each group received) of the patient journey in figure 1.

Response: Thank you, we think this is an excellent idea. We have modified figure one to include a new row called “Activities carried out by CHWs”. Please note that track changes does not
record changes to the figure, but all text in this row and below is new in response to your suggestion.

It is also not immediately clear whether you are trying to assess the impact that CHWs trained additionally on ANC and PMTCT have on public satisfaction compared to those untrained? In clarifying these throughout the paper, the aim and the derivation of the conclusion of the study can then be much clearer to the reader.

Response: We are happy to provide this clarity. We added a sentence to the end of the background section where we explicitly state our aims (lines 111-113) to say “This evaluation compared a CHW intervention that included additional CHWs and additional training (as outlined in figure 1) to an existing model of CHW that did not include training specific to maternal health.” We also made an edit to the phrasing of the first sentence of the discussion section to read “This cluster-randomized community health worker intervention provides evidence that CHWs providing maternal health support are able to improve women’s satisfaction with both the CHW program and the overall public-sector health system in Dar es Salaam above a CHW program that does not provide this support.” Finally, we added the phrase “focusing on maternal health” to the first sentence in our “conclusions” section.

Finally, I would suggest adding to the study conclusion that the application of the study findings by policy-makers and implementers should be done in the light of contextual health systems and populations needs and priorities. See: WHO guideline on health policy and system support to optimize community health worker programmes. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2018.

Response: We agree that this is true so we have added the following text to the conclusion, together with the recommended citation: “implementation of these findings should be applied with attention to the specific health system and population needs and priorities.[27]”

Reviewer #2: I have no further comment.

Response: Thank you for taking the time to review our revisions.