Author’s response to reviews

Title: Is a woman's first pregnancy outcome related to her years of schooling? An assessment of women's adolescent pregnancy outcomes and subsequent educational attainment in Ghana

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Author’s response to reviews:

Dear Editor-in-Chief

We are grateful for these latest set of comments and the opportunity to once again revise the manuscript titled, “Is a woman’s first pregnancy outcome related to her years of schooling? An assessment of women’s adolescent pregnancy outcomes and subsequent educational attainment in Ghana”. Please find below our comments to the concerns raised by the reviewer.

Line 54: Recommend shifting language "resort to induced abortions," unless there is strong evidence to show that abortions are the absolute last choice or the last resort) of these girls.

Response: The language has been modified to “choose to terminate the pregnancy” since, as was rightly mentioned by the reviewer, abortion may not always be their last resort

Line 64: I imagine the article will address this, so my comment may be pre-emptive, but is there any exploration of how induced abortion was unsafe and (likely) led to maternal death. Therefore, the statistics around the highest years of schooling is only if she survives the abortion?

Response: For this study, there is no direct examination of the safety of the abortion other than a reference to other studies that examined women’s use of safe and unsafe methods and the factors associated with women’s use of these methods. However, it was rightly pointed out that the statistics around the highest years of schooling are only for those who survived the abortion to report this as their first pregnancy.
Line 106: Does this statement suggest that women who have terminated a pregnancy under age 20 have even higher educational attainment than woman who don't experience a pregnancy at all under age 20? It's unclear if that's the specific comparison here.

Response: The statement made was intended to suggest that young women are likely to use induced abortion to remain in school when pregnant in order to attain higher educational levels. For the study cited, it was not in comparison to those who do not experience a pregnancy but to those who gave birth. This information has been included in the paragraph.

Line 113: Should it be "sexual debut" versus "sex debut"?

Response: The word “sex” has been changed to “sexual”.

Line 117: Is it understood to be "risky health seeking behavior" versus a lack of SRH knowledge, services, and rights? Framing these issues in this term would suggest that the sole onus is on girls to know what to do when they're pregnant and when she doesn't call it "risky behavior."

Response: The term “risky health seeking behaviour” has been rephrased as “a lack of sexual and reproductive health knowledge and access to services” as this better describes the situation of young women compared to their older counterparts.

Line 126: question regarding "those who were not pregnant" -- does this mean those who were never pregnant?

Response: The group that were not pregnant were those whose pregnancy results were negative two years prior. It does not necessarily mean though that they were never pregnant within that period.

Line 160: I would suggest clarifying this first hypothesis. Is this an accurate rephrasing? - Girls seek abortion services to continue their schooling.

Response: Rephrasing the statement at this point in time to what was suggested, that is, “girls seek abortion services to continue their education” may mistakenly imply that young girls’ are only using safe abortion services. However, since they are more likely to use unsafe methods, the statement has been rephrased to read, “girls undergo induced abortions to continue their education”.
Line 217: When you say, in parentheses ("and for some their only"), do you mean their only
pregnancy at all? Or their only pregnancy under 20? The way the placement of the parentheses
suggests the latter.

Response: The statement refers to their only pregnancies, and not only their pregnancies below
age 20. The statement in the paragraph has been moved and revised in order to convey the
former meaning.

Line 221: Related to my previous question: is this looking at these categories for only first
pregnancies under 20?

Response: This is true; the pregnancy outcomes that have been categorized, that is, live births,
still births/miscarriages and induced abortions, are for pregnancies that occurred when the
women were below age 20. A concluding sentence has been included to reiterate the fact that the
pregnancy refers to the women’s first pregnancies as teenagers.

Line 265: Would recommend clarifying "younger ones" -- what is the age range of this group?

Response: The “younger ones” refers to the 20 to 29 year old women in the sample and this has
been indicated in the sentence.

Line 334: The group "ever been pregnant women" is a bit awkward to read.

Response: The term has been revised to make it sound less awkward.

Line 397: Throughout the paper, this is the clearest statement of a conclusion.

Response: We have no response for this comment

Line 415: It is very likely outside the scope of this paper, but is there any correlation between the
"brightest and most ambitious pupils" and wealth quintile, suggesting that those who have what
is seen as the "drive" to stay in school actually also have the resources to do so, and also likely
the family pressures to do so as well?

Response: The regression results do indicate that the richer the household wealth quintiles the
higher the woman’s educational attainment. However, nothing can be directly stated about
whether those with the resources are also the brightest and most ambitious. It would be an interesting study to conduct but is currently outside the scope of this paper.

Line 418: Is it more appropriate to say "schooling [can] have a protective effect," given that for some girls school is not a safe environment?
Response: This reviewer is right about the school environment not being protective for all girls; therefore, the statement has been revised to include the “can”.

Line 428: Is it more appropriate to say "have accessed abortion services," or some variation, rather than "used abortion"?
Response: This has been noted and revised.

Line 434: This begs the same question as the one I ask on line 415. Are ambitions and aspirations understood to be connected to wealth and privilege? And are the girls who survive abortion those who are likely to be able to afford somewhat safe conditions?
Response: The literature does suggest that household wealth is associated with use of safe abortion services among women in Ghana. However, for this study we were not able to distinguish this although it is highly plausible and must be considered in subsequent studies.

Line 436: It's unclear and inconsistent when "girls" and "women" are used.
Response: This has been noted. The term “girls” is used when referring to the women in the sample as they experienced the various outcomes as teenagers while the “women” refers to them in their present state when the survey was conducted. However, this has been modified to women in the sentence.

Line 448: This is very dark, but is this perhaps because many girls and women don't survive unsafe abortion? Or if they survive, they experience severe morbidity?
Response: The reviewer may be right in that fewer women using unsafe methods are surviving to even report their methods and educational attainment.
Line 498: I would recommend leading this paragraph with Line 501 "Pregnancy at young ages..." It's a very strong statement!

Response: The statement has been revised as the reviewer rightly indicated it is a very strong statement being made.

And my last comments, about the abstract (after having read the article):

Abstract:

- In Conclusions: Flagging the use of "cause for concern" regarding girls' access to abortion -- Given how difficult it is to make the case for access to safe abortion generally, but especially for girls, it is advised to find another turn of phase here as to prevent inaccurate conclusions by those who wish to further restrict abortion access. It's not the fact that girls are accessing abortions, but rather that the abortions they have access to are unsafe, as this sentence reads. My concern is that this research can and may be used to further restrict girls' access to abortion, where the logic is that abortion negatively affects the educational attainment of girls (glazing over the "unsafe" bit specifically in this sentence). Could the emphasis be shifted to the safety of the services available?

Response: We understand that the phrasing of the sentence may be interpreted in different ways. However, we still want to emphasize that since unsafe methods are options that most young women are choosing as their means to terminate pregnancies this may not be their best option and hence they should not rely on abortion as their only means to continue schooling when faced with a pregnancy. The sentence has been modified to reflect this.

Again, we appreciate the chance to revise the manuscript and look forward to a favourable response from you.

Yours sincerely,

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