Reviewer’s report

Title: Determinants of Reproductive Health Services Utilization among Rural Female Adolescents in Asgede-Tsimbla district Northern Ethiopia: A community Based Cross-Sectional Study

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Reviewer: Shawn Malarcher

Reviewer’s report:

The article describes results from a cross-sectional survey of adolescents in Ethiopia and the health seeking behavior relevant to SRH. Overall, the study has the potential to provide insight into this important population group. However, the current article includes some significant gaps which make it difficult to understand the results and how they might be used to improve policy. The article could be strengthened by addressing the following:

Overall, the authors seemed to frame the entire study and paper around the premise that ALL adolescent girls should seek SRH services at least every year. This premise followed through to the conclusion of the paper which reads as if programs should instill more fear in young girls that they are at danger of terrible SRH consequences (at least this is how it reads). Are all the girls in the study truly at risk of adverse SRH outcomes? Are they all engaged in sexual activity? Clearly they all need accurate information, but I would argue that they don't NEED to get this information from health services. I suggest the authors reframe the conclusion to include a broader perspective on what young people need, where they want to get it, and how the health system can better support them.

1. I was surprised that there were no married adolescents included in the study population. Were these girls excluded from the study or has the context changed that much? If the study found no married adolescents in the study population that will be important to note. If these girls were excluded, please clarify (also include ANY other exclusion criteria).

2. I was surprised to see the study sample skewed so heavily toward older adolescents. If the study was truly random, I would've expected to see more balance among the age groups. Please clarify this point.

3. I found the abstract failed to capture the most compelling parts of the study. That many young people are accessing services and what barriers are most common and most likely to inhibit accessing services. Focus on those determinants that are within the manageable interest of the program (not sure how the health system can address lower access among young people from divorced families.)

4. It's disjointed to say the majority of young people are accessing services and then say "utilizing SRH services is very low". Perhaps the strategy is unrealistic. Consider focusing on what the authors think is needed to improve SRH among young people.
5. Authors should include something about child marriage in the background section. Even if the study did not include married women it seems strange not to say anything about child marriage given the high incidence in this setting.

6. Page 4. lines 88-92. This paragraph feels like blame the victim. Girls are exposed to HIV and RHP because they're having unprotected sex. Consider including a more nuanced description of the issues you are exploring. Sex outside of marriage is taboo and often unplanned....

Line 96-97 Can you include a bit more about the incidence of early and unprotected sex among this population. I found it surprising that the authors suggest this is a common occurrence in this context. Is this a changing trend?

8. Line 98-101. Study refers to Youth Risk Behavior Survey but the citation is for the strategy. Citation should reference the survey. Also include, what percentage of girls report having sex (married and unmarried). 17% said they didn't use protection. That means 83% did use protection! Did the 17% want to get pregnant?

9. 45% of births are among adolescents. What % is among married girls? What % were mistimed/unwanted?

Line 104 "Sexual violence and commercial sex are common" Citation? Can you give a sense of incidence?

11. What does line 109 mean?

12. Line 121 What is an "intrapersonal factor"?


14. I found the analysis confusing. It would help the reader understand the study if more information was given on the variables. What did you ask them to assess knowledge? What barriers were included? Reporting as continuous variable loses important information from the study. E.g. it would be helpful to know what were the most reported barriers? What aspects of knowledge were least well-known. And then did citing these barriers/knowledge have an effect on utilization.

Likewise, the timing doesn't seem to line up. You asked about ever use of modern contraception but reported that as access in the last 12 months. What if they obtained the contraceptive 2 years ago? What if they got the method from a pharmacy or a friend? What if the boy brought a condom, so the method was not obtained by the girl at all?

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