Reviewer’s report

Title: Can sexual health interventions make community-based health systems more responsive to adolescents? A realist informed study in rural Zambia

Version: 0  Date: 14 Oct 2019

Reviewer: Dinah Amongin

Reviewer's report:

General comments:
This manuscript explores the potential role of the different community-based health systems in advancing adolescent sexual health in a developing country setting. Adolescent sexual and reproductive health is a major public health concern most especially in sub-Saharan Africa that faces great challenges in SRH information and services access.

The study findings provide a program theory about why, how and circumstances under which SRH interventions can make CBHS more responsive to adolescents. Developing program theories that can be tested is key to finding appropriate implementing approaches.

The manuscript is well written, and I recommend it be published after the authors consider a few minor comments below.

Specific comments:
Introduction
* Please provide the source of statistics in line 1. Young people and youth take on different meaning and it may be good to clarify or limit your statistics to adolescents.
* When referencing, please use the relevant work. For example reference 1 was a cross-sectional study among 403 adolescents from a school in Tanzania. It was not from the DHS but you used it to back up evidence from Demographic Health Surveys (line 3 and 4). Line 5/6 "in many cases they do not use any form of protection to prevent pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections [2].", the reference provided does not support this evidence. That reference was a review on mechanisms of improving adolescent access to SRH services. There is current work in these areas such as…https://reproductive-health-journal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12978-017-0393-3
* Reference 4, lines 5-8: I am not sure about how relevant this is to the statement about adolescents engaging in nonconsensual sex and high sexual abuse. A lot of work has been done by UNICEF to quantify this challenge and the reasons why it is very prevalent. Please retrieve some of these references.
* I suggest you revisit the references. Reference 6 may not best support lines 10-13.
* Reference 4 and 6 are the same.
* Page 6 (lines 1-7), I suggest the Global strategy for Women's, Children's, and Adolescent's Health, AA-HA and the QoC guidelines for adolescents.

Methods
* Under data collection (page 10), please clarify/provide more information on who the "key stakeholders" were; CBHS workers, project workers, etc. Clarification of the study participants is key to the interpretation of the final program theory. Do not stop at only gender and age.
The realist evaluation protocol that you published in 2018 may not be accessed or referred to, by all readers.

Results and discussion
* Did you find any divergent views? Please highlight this. Include in the discussion section.

Level of interest
Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An article of importance in its field

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

Acceptable

Declaration of competing interests
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