Reviewer's report

Title: Mind the gaps and their implications for policy: a qualitative study of perceptions of healthcare professionals on challenges and proposed remedies for cervical cancer health seeking in post conflict northern Uganda.

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Reviewer: Fiona Walter

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Mind the gaps and their implications for policy: a qualitative study of perceptions of healthcare professionals on challenges and proposed remedies for cervical cancer health seeking in post conflict northern Uganda.

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The paper reports interviews with 15 healthcare professionals involved in the diagnosis and care of women with cervical cancer in post-conflict Northern Uganda. The findings described perceived challenges for patients as well as actual challenges for the healthcare professionals themselves at practitioner, service and policy levels. The authors make a number of recommendations based on these findings to improve cervical cancer care in their region of sub-Saharan Africa. The interview study is well described, and the data in the tables and quotations support the interpretations made. The findings are novel and important, and the paper makes an exciting addition to the developing world cancer care literature.

While I recommend this paper for publication, it first needs some minor essential revisions which are mainly concerning strengthening the qualitative report, use of English, and definitions.

(1) What does ‘health seeking for diagnosis and management of cervical cancer’ mean? I thought this was about help-seeking, but then understood it to mean all stages of the patients’ cancer journey from symptom recognition to palliative care. Perhaps the authors could add a definition?

(2) Both the paper itself, and many of the quotations are long, and could be briefer. It would read better if some of the minor details are omitted (examples below) and each quotation is carefully checked as to whether it could be shortened.

(3) The abstract could be clearer, particularly the methods e.g. replace the names of both hospitals with ‘2 hospitals in Northern Uganda’.

(4) Remember throughout the paper that the views are those of the healthcare professional and not the patients- this needs clarification in several places, e.g. p34: this qualitative study explored in detail healthcare professionals perceptions of…
(5) P6: Study design. Could omit the first sentence, and add 'we chose a qualitative design using in-depth interviews'.

(6) P7: Data collection- last sentence could be omitted as it repeats Study design

(7) P8: add 'was audio-recorded' to end of last sentence in procedures

(8) P9: could omit sentence beginning: 'The various coded segments...

(9) P11: could omit last sentence: Majority of respondents’ as already said this at beginning of the section

(10) P12: Title: Lack of awareness and unawareness… should be awareness… (as it’s the lack of)

(11) P17: Sensitization program- should this be ‘Awareness programmes’?

(12) P28: 63.3% and 90.6% in western Uganda and Kampala… then suggest you omit ‘low level of information flow’

(13) P30: Ref 28- which country is this work set in?

(14) P30: ‘reported self inadequacies’ should read: self-reported inadequacies’

(15) P32 onwards; is the phrase ‘stock out’ widely used in Uganda? I know it as ‘empty stock’ etc.

(16) P34: replace ‘exhaustive’ with ‘generalisable’

(17) Table 2 & 3: are good but report qualitative data so should not also have percentages. Please omit the %; the numbers alone give contextual support for the findings.

(18) Use of English- I have made a list but it is not exhaustive so please could the authors carefully check the rest of the manuscript?
   a. Replace ‘exposure of private parts of women’ with women’s' private parts’
   b. Many sentences start with Majority- please add ‘The majority…’
   c. P4: replace ‘shrowded’ with ‘concerning’
   d. P4: replace moral distress with ‘low morale and distress’
   e. Check the tense used throughout the manuscript e.g. p12: ‘the women are perceived’ should be ‘the women were perceived..’; p13: However, some respondents were concern…. Should be ‘concerned’
   f. You use ‘were intrigued’ several times but it doesn’t really make sense- perhaps replace with ‘discussed’?
   g. You use ‘Findings of this study’ several times. Please replace ‘of’ with ‘from’

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests
Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests