Reviewer's report

Title: From maternal complication to death in Kinshasa hospitals: testimonies from women or their families

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Reviewer: Johanne Sundby

Reviewer's report:

This is a good paper on an important issue. It is sad reading, but needs attention. I have suggestions for a few changes. The main message, that access to emergency, life saving adequate care - for some - is a matter of finances - due too extreme or relative poverty - is devatstating. Even in a bid city like kinshasa where the socioeconomic status is above that of the country at large.

In the abstract: You use the word "ignore". It is linguistics, but in my head "ignore" mean you are aware of a thing, but you fail to address it. My interpretation of this is that these women have inadequate knowledge of what the danger signs are, thus they don't ignore them, but fail to identify them and act upon it. This may seem as semantics, but i don't want us to blame women for not knowing what to do. They are not at all empowered neither by their society nor their health workers. Thus; be ware of the terminology.

Also, in the introduction, I would actually draw in the new maternal mortality estimates that were published recently in the Lancet and problematize this a little: that we don't really know the "right" estimate of maternal ill health and mortality, but that it is still a problematic area with way too many deaths, even if people deliver at health facilities. This feeds into the current debate on access to skilled care; what are the implications.

On the same paragraph: yoy say: "either by poor quality care or by delays in uptake of care". in my opinion, this is not an either/or issue, but both factors contibute simultaneously.

On the discussion of cases (page 2 of the ms)you say you exclude miscarriages abortions etc. Say one sentence of why and also, if possible, add a sentence on what you know about this problem. We should not exclude abortions from maternal mortality complications. Especially since the title "maternal" also refers to deaths in first trimester.

You did not really include a full two controls for each case, so maybe say "attempted".....?

In the Context paragraph, it may sound as if inhabitants of Kinshasa are "rich". This country is in general poor, so maybe show where Congo is on a general development index of poverty? And say a sentence about the extent of big city poverty pockets if they do exist?
One question: were there any formal ethical clearances or just research permission?

In Data analysis: Since part of the analysis is qualitative I would add a sentence on analytic framework. It seems as if you may have used a "content analysis" - is that so? I think qualitative readers would like to see this mentioned. Also do add that your theoretical analytic model is indeed the "three delays" model, it has been widely used and is useful.

Results:
Again, try to avoid using the word "ignorance" and "ignore" about the women. They are poorly informed.

I would say that in your results, lack of money is a MAJOR obstacle (not just "another") for seeking health care.

Discussion: You use (not for profit or for profit facilities) I guess even in Kinshasa there are public, NGO and private facilities, maybe this is a better distinction? I do actually miss a little explanation about maternal care policy/financial policy in Kinshasa, as it comes up as an issue. What are the pay for care mechanisms in the various sectors of health care? How much is actually asked for, in payment?

The findings are not surprising. The issue is not new and unknown, but the demonstration in this paper and a few other papers of what is at stake has to be taken seriously. It is a major ethical issue that our colleagues don't provide care for women who cannot pay up front. These problems have to be sorted out as a policy issue, not on an individual level.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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

Declaration of competing interests:
No competing interest. But I work on the same thematic areas in my own research.