Author's response to reviews

Title: 'A hidden disorder until the pieces fall into place' - a qualitative study of vaginal prolapse

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‘A hidden disorder until the pieces fall into place – a qualitative study of vaginal prolapse’.

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Author’s response to the reviewers:

We would like to thank the reviewers for their valuable comments on our manuscript.

It enabled us to improve the current paper.

Our point-by-point responses to the reviewers are as the following:

Reviewer no.1: Sushma Srikrishna

Major compulsory revisions:

Point no.1: “Clarify consent procedure”

Response point no.1: The informants received verbal and written information about the study and verbal informed consent was received from each informant before the interview was conducted. There is no current request that written informed consent is needed. For clarification, the information is added at page 6, second paragraph.

Point no.2: “Acknowledge limitations in terms of small sample size and revisions to interview guide mid study”

Response point no.2: In qualitative methods, data are commonly collected until level of saturation has been achieved. After performing 12 interviews with parallel
analysis, the research group assessed that saturation of data probably was
achieved. However, we made two more interviews in order to confirm that no
further significant information related to the research question was obtainable.
After 14 interviews the research group assessed that the level of redundancy
was reached. In summary, we interviewed informants until the saturation of data
related to the study question was achieved, meaning that no further substantial
information was obtained with further recruitment of informants.

Revision of interview guidelines during an ongoing study is a part of applying an
emergent qualitative study design. As the analysis proceeded the interview guide
is altered as to address the new knowledge emerging during the analysis. By this
procedure, the topics of interest to investigate may be explored thoroughly. The
design of a study in qualitative research is a subject of change if necessary due
to the results obtained during the study. Emergent design is a method to enhance
the quality of the ongoing research and is a common component of qualitative
research. This information is stated at page 7, first paragraph.

Reviewer no.2: John E Jelovsek

Point no.1: “The title is confusing. I would suggest the title be more specific to the
content of the manuscript. Maybe a title such as, “a qualitative study of health
care seeking behaviour among women undergoing surgery for pelvic organ
prolapse”.

Response Point no.1: Our intention was to choose a title that is not descriptive
and also convey our findings. According to the other reviewer’s report
(S.Srikrishna) the title finds accurately conveying the findings. Therefore we
would appreciate to keep the title unaltered.

Point no.2: “The term “process of comprehension and action” although explained
in the text is confusing and I am not sure whether using it contributes to
additional understanding. I would consider removing it altogether.”

Response point no.2: The context in the “process of action and comprehension”
defining the “process” which is one of our findings in this paper. The term
“process of comprehension and action” can give more accurate information about
this process. We therefore would appreciate to keep this label of the process.

Point no.3: “For the inclusion criteria on page 5, please clarify how symptomatic
women were determined to be symptomatic.”

Response point no.3: The most specific symptom associated with pelvic organ
prolapse (POP) is vaginal bulging; however, other complaints including bladder
and bowel may be associated to POP but are not specific to POP. Women with
symptoms related to vaginal prolapse, underwent a pelvic examination. For
clarification this information is added on page 4, last paragraph and at page 5,
first paragraph.

Point no.4: “On page 5, please explain the term purposive sampling for the
readers.”

Response point no. 4: Purposive sampling denotes a striving for maximum variation for example in background characteristics of the informants included in the study. Explanation of this term is stated and clarified better on page 5, first paragraph and is highlighted with yellow colour.

Point no.5: “Please state whether patients underwent informed consent for the study?”

Response point no. 5: The informants received verbal and written information about the study and informed consent was received from the informants before each interview was conducted. For clarification the information is added at page 6, second paragraph.

Point no.6: “Please clarify saturation was or was not achieved rather than “probably achieved” and what method and/or criteria was used to determine this?”

Response point no.6: In qualitative methods, data are commonly collected until level of saturation has been achieved. After performing 12 interviews with parallel analysis, the research group assessed that saturation of data probably was achieved. However, we made two more interviews in order to confirm that no further significant information related to the research question was obtainable. After 14 interviews the research group assessed that the level of redundancy was reached. In accordance with the reviewer’s suggestion the text has been changed, at page 7, first paragraph.

Point no. 7: “Please describe the background, training, and preconceptions of the investigators? Since the investigators are being relied on for the analysis of the data, we must know their training and biases. Knowing these characteristics, we can use them to evaluate their conclusions”.

Response point no.7: The first author (MoP) is an urogynecologist, second author (MaP) is a midwife, third author (ML) is general gynaecologist and the last author (IM) is an obstetrician. All authors are experienced in their professional field. MaP and IM are experienced in research using qualitative methodology. In qualitative study, researcher and informants are interactive. There is a risk that the researchers pre-understanding can influence the study results. As the authors have various professional and methodological experiences, the pre-understandings within the team have been discussed and challenged in the process of analysing the data. This procedure may strengthen the findings. As the reviewer has pointed out, this is an important subject to discuss and it is stated and highlighted in the first paragraph in the section, Methodological consideration, page 21.

Point no.8: “Following on 7, did the researchers’ original preconceptions change or are they surprised by the study results as they emerged?”
Response point no. 8: We are surprised by some of the study results.