Reviewer’s report

Title: Conscientious objection to referrals for abortion: pragmatic solution or threat to women’s rights? A qualitative interview study

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Reviewer: Christina Zampas

Reviewer’s report:

The article is well-written and provides useful information on potential ethical issues in the context conscientious objection. I believe it will make an important contribution to the field. Below are a few comments to consider:

1. It would be important to set forth explicitly in the beginning of the article the ethical issues that are implicated in the context of conscientious objection to abortion services and the potential ethical duties providers have in this context. It would be useful to have this at the beginning of the article, so as to have background to subsequent information. The article somewhat assumes that the reader understands the ethical issues and duties. For example, when the issue of referral comes up it is somewhat assumed that the reader understands that there is a clear ethical duty concerning ensuring continuity of care.

2. Related to point one above, it would be useful for the authors to explicitly identify gaps in the ethical guidance in relation to their research findings. The article somewhat gets to this, but it is not clear.

3. While there is value in the study and in the findings, the informant is group is small, only 7. Would be helpful if there is an explanation as to why the informant group is small and that despite this small number there is a value to these findings.

4. Add in the Discussion section some discussion on the distinction between partaking in the actual abortion procedure versus fulfilling duties to provide information to patients and/or ensuring continuity of care, in this case referrals, which is a bedrock of patient rights and ethical duties on the part of the provider.

5. It would be useful to add more information explaining the two reasons behind the approach taken to addressing the practice of conscientious objection—lack of regulations and religious denominations, but especially on the former. There seems to be a jump here and would be useful to hear more of how that jump was made.

6. It would be useful to understand clearly if the authors are proposing more legal regulation and/or ethical guidance on the practice? What is the positive impact that could have and what is the negative in Norway?

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests
Quality of written English: Acceptable

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

Declaration of competing interests:
None.