Reviewer's report

Title: Evaluation of health workforce competence in maternal and neonatal issues in public health sector of Pakistan: An assessment of their training needs.

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Reviewer: sahar Hassan

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Manuscript Title: Evaluation of health workforce competence in maternal and neonatal issues in public health sector of Pakistan: An assessment of their training needs

Reviewer comments

This is a quantitative design that reports the gaps in basic competencies of various health care providers working in the public health facilities in 10 selected districts in Pakistan. The assessment was carried out in order to help in designing a training program for these cadres. The study highlights crucial gaps in the basic competencies of the main health care providers for maternal and neonatal health care that might have a direct impact on the safety and quality of maternal health care in low income countries.

Major Compulsory Revisions:

1) The study needs to add a little more CONTEXT as this will add more understanding of findings and conclusions. In addition to that, adding more context will give the study a different flavor and more comprehensive picture besides the numbers and percentages. I would advise and prefer that authors add what is available to them from their data collection / analysis which will strengthen their work. For example:

• The type of education of these cadres. What kind of education / training these cadres (physicians, nurses, midwives and health workers) have?
• Years of experience of these cadres in the area of maternal / newborn care?
• Availability of equipments and supplies for resuscitation, guidelines, other resources …etc
• Roles and responsibilities of various health care providers categories: i.e. who is responsible what? Who conducts antenatal care visits? Who conducts births? Who takes care of normal newborns? Who is responsible to carry on neonatal resuscitation?

2) Results:

In the abstract and in Page 12: Paragraph # 1: The authors tried to establish a comparative competency between all cadres in the area of maternal and
newborn knowledge and practice. However, I would argue that this comparison is not necessary and not logic to me, simply because the authors are not comparing a homogenous groups or disciplines. Each type of cadre represents a profession and a discipline that vary in their basic preparation, education, training, roles and job descriptions in the clinical field.

So, I think the comparison here is out of place without a clear and careful discussion in the manuscript and / acknowledgement in the limitations of this study.

3) Discussion:
Page 13: Why is the wide variation in scores within the each cadre? This would an interesting point to discuss a bit more.

Page 14: Paragraph # 3 AND Page 15: Paragraph # 2: I think authors need to be more careful when discussing the poor performance of their cadres especially nurses and midwives in the area of counseling and communication. A more understanding and discussion need to be allotted to this Western-like concept and how it relates to the cultural norms and / women status and / the context of health services in Pakistan.

4) Conclusions:
The authors has acknowledged that it is not enough to implement training, but also it is very crucial to consider ‘contextual factors’ and how these can influence the outcomes of these training programs. (Page 4, paragraph # 2).
The authors need to be more careful when discussing the poor performance of their cadres especially nurses and midwives in the area of counseling and communication. A more understanding and discussion need to be allotted to this Western-like concept and how it relates to the cultural norms and / women status and / the context of health services in Pakistan.

Minor Essential Revisions:
1) In the results section: Page 11: Paragraph # 4:
• First, The mean score used here is 63.7 while authors are referring to table 3 where the mean score in the figure is 63.8. Please review and unify and use same mean score in the figure and the text.
• Second, Table 3 does not show variation in districts as described in the text, it compares average scores between different cadres in the areas of maternal and neonatal knowledge. Please review and modify the written text describing table 3.

2) Needs a review the whole manuscript including the references for some punctuation modifications. i.e. spaces before and after the coma or a full stop.

3) References list review: unify authors’ names style. i.e. references # 15, 20, 25.
Discretionary Revisions:

1) Page 13: paragraph 3: why cadres fail to achieve minimum level of neonatal resuscitation? Is it related to basic training, lack of equipments, no refresher courses, ….etc

2) Main demographic characteristics of the health care providers (age, sex)

3) Rationale for the tools of assessment. In the limitations section, authors discussed why they preferred using MCQs. But, I was wondering why authors preferred using a test-like approach in this assessment? It would be interesting and helpful for the reader to know the reason/s.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.