Reviewer's report

Title: Health worker preferences for working in rural clinics in Uganda: a discrete choice experiment

Version: 2 Date: 20 March 2012

Reviewer: Sitaporn Youngkong

Reviewer's report:

General comments:

The paper applied discrete choice experiments (DCE) to analyse stated preferences for job characteristics among medical, nursing, pharmacy, and laboratory students in training programs at the Universities in Uganda. The results of this study are intended to inform policy on designing particular effective strategies to address health worker shortages at health facilities in rural areas. However, I have some questions and comments as below;

Major compulsory revisions:

1. Regarding the DCE design, five of six attributes were the same for each of the 4 cadres. The final attribute was different for each cadre. Why did the authors come up with this design? Why did not you choose the same set of attributes for the design?

2. The results of willingness to pay on page 8 do not seem to match with the data in Table 4. For example, in the text the authors stated that ‘Respondents in all groups had a consistently high willingness to trade salary for good quality health facility infrastructure and equipment and a supportive manager’. While Table 4 shows the different perspective among cadres and it is not right for every cadre that they were willing to trade salary with such the 2 attributes. It would be more understandable if the authors clarified how you come up with the above conclusion. Please check or clarify.

3. Table 3 (of every panel) shows the results of mixed logit model of DCE data. It is not clear what the column of ‘Mean’ and ‘SD’ mean? Are those ‘Coefficient’ and ‘Standard error’? Please clarify both in the table and text.

4. The reporting of the results requires some improvement.

4.1 For Table 1, the description of attributes and levels should be presented along with their definitions. This may be more understandable for the readers.

4.2 For Table 3, the results should include not only the estimates of model coefficients, but corresponding standard errors or confidence intervals along with associated p-values.

5 DCE is becoming a valuable technique used for eliciting information on preferences. However, DCE has a number of limitations that need to be coped with additional approach, e.g. deliberative process, to make better understanding
of the respondents’ preferences. For this manuscript, although respondents were
told (at the beginning of the DCE administration) to consider all scenarios to be
located in rural areas, as stated in the discussion section, we do not know
whether or not they really realized this assumption when they made decisions
from the DCE survey. Moreover, there would be some more reasons that attract
and retain health workers working in rural areas. This can be captures in the
process of deliberation or other additional approaches. Extensively discussion on
this issue is appreciated.

Minor essential revisions:
1. The authors use ‘medical officers’ and ‘medical students’ interchangeable (this
also happens with ‘nursing officers’ and ‘nursing students’). I understand that
participants in this study were students who representing each health worker
cadre. However, it seems to me that using ‘officer’ in this case does not refer to
‘professionals’.

Discretionary revisions:
1. The authors state in the first sentence of the 4th paragraph on page 3 that
‘One method for assessing the potential effectiveness of strategies for attracting
and retaining health workers in underserved areas is the DCE’. I don’t think only
the results analysed from DCE leading to the potential effective strategies for this
issue. Please reconsider this point.
2. Table 3 for all 4 panels should be combined in a Table.
3. The authors use many names/terms inconsistency, e.g. attributes and cadres.
This can make the readers confused.

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