Reviewer’s report

Title: Perceptions and factors influencing job satisfaction of health workers working on HIV/AIDS in Vietnam: a qualitative study

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Reviewer: Nils Gunnar Songstad

Reviewer’s report:

The manuscript addresses a very important topic and helps us understand factors that influence health workers’ performance. The paper nicely addresses this in the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and further adds important details on the specific Vietnamese context. The reviewer appreciates the level of detail and finds research on the complexity of factors influencing the quality of health services very important. The focus on job satisfaction is important and the manuscript convincingly argues for the importance of health sector job satisfaction.

The background spells out the importance of a qualified and motivated workforce and reference is made to the important 2006 World Health Report. It is stated that “it is important to understand what motivates them and the extent to which they are satisfied by the organizations they work”, a statement the reviewer fully agrees to.

The manuscript has the potential to be a good contribution to the debate of how to motivate health workers in resource poor settings. The reviewer would however like to see some changes to manuscript. The major issues necessary to address are:

a.) Conceptualisation and definition of job satisfaction
b.) The link between job satisfaction and motivation
c.) Table 1 and table 2 – the reviewer finds that the use of these two tables compromises the stated exploratory nature of the research
d.) Figure 1 and 2 – the role and placement of Figure 1 is not clear

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
The two research question spelled out on top on page 5 accurately set the focus of the paper. As discussed in the detailed comments below it is suggested to somehow address the link between job satisfaction and motivation.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
The description of the methods are OK, but the reviewer find that the explorative design is compromised (re. the discussion of the two tables).

3. Are the data sound?
Yes, as far as the reviewer can assess.
4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
Yes, as far as the reviewer can assess.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
The Discussion and conclusion could be improved and explore more of the depth of the data. Some further are provided below

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
This section is short but good and precise. The reviewer however questions the placement of the section in the manuscript. It is suggested to seek the advice of the editor.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
As far as the reviewer can assess, this seems to be adequately handled.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
Yes

9. Is the writing acceptable?
Overall OK language, but some sentences are a bit unclear. It is advised that the authors pay attention to ensuring concise language to avoid ambiguities.

Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

1. The manuscript in its title and through the text uses the concept of job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is one of several possible approaches to the study of factors with impact on health workers’ performance. The reviewer however finds the conceptualisation of ‘job satisfaction’ to be a bit unclear. Two different approaches, or interpretations, of job satisfaction seem to be applied in the manuscript.
   a.) job satisfaction concerning the current employment
   b.) job satisfaction concerning availability of jobs and labour market dynamics (for example as the concept is used in the first part of “Job and training opportunities”)

The reviewer suggests to limit the use of the concept of job satisfaction to the first interpretation above as this would make the argument come out clearer and add to the value of this study. The manuscript importantly discusses the impact of job opportunities. This is an important feature of the labour market dynamics in the health sector in low- and middle-income countries. The reviewer would prefer that this is discussed separately and not included under job satisfaction. However, if Spector defines job satisfaction as indicated under b) above, this
must be clearly stated and referenced.

2. The overall aim of the manuscript seems to be to identify factors with impact on the quality of health services, hence it is important to go beyond job satisfaction and also address issues of motivation. It is generally accepted that a worker can be satisfied without being motivated. Also the contrary is possible (although less likely) that a worker is motivated but dissatisfied. This is a conundrum, and a paper like the one under review could address it. This is closely linked to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and the reviewer would like to see that the manuscript somehow addresses this distinction.

3. Under Data analysis it is explained that “This study applied a hybrid approach to content analysis that combined the data-driven inductive approach of Boyatzis (1998) [16] with a previously established list of theoretical categories derived from the JSS [8].” This probably accurately describes the approach. The data analysis section is overall good but some confusion arises when JSS is introduced. What concerns the reviewer is the statement: “Using the JSS as a framework, the subcategories were organized into nine categories that corresponded to the nine factors previously listed.”. The authors should address two important questions:

a) Placing the codes emerging from the data into a pre-existing set of codes inevitably entails some degree of “forcing” data into the categories. How was this done and what challenges did the authors face?

b) How did the authors treat codes and categories emerging from the data that did not fit with the JSS categories?

4. Closely linked to the comment above, the reviewer questions the use and placement of table 1 and table 2:

a.) Does table 1 stem from Spector’s JSS? If so, is it appropriate to place table 1 in the Results section? It would probably be better to place it in the background section and refer to it as an important study in its field or as a theoretical framework.

b.) Is table 2 the authors’ compilation of factors in table 1? If yes, doesn’t this compromise the exploratory nature of the research as stated under study design?

c.) Are all the categories and factors in table 2 supported by the data?

d.) Would it be better to present the table in the end of the Results section as a summary of the findings? This requires of course that all elements of the table are supported by data.

The overall question is whether it is correct to refer to this study as a “qualitative exploratory” study.

5. As far as the reviewer can assess, the difference between Figure 1 and Figure 2 (on the two un-paginated pages following after page 31) is only the inclusion of stigma in the latter. The focus on stigma is the important contribution of the manuscript, but modifying an existing model by including only an additional factor
hardly qualifies to be referred to as a conceptual model.

6. The manuscript doesn’t indicate where Figure 1 is intended to be. It could be placed at the end of the Background section (as suggested for table 1), but it is probably better to list the items in the figure as it is done in the end of the Background section. The reviewer suggests to delete figure 1 and explain it in more detail when explaining what is currently Figure 2 (which then becomes figure 1).

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

1. The manuscript nicely elaborates on stigma and argues (page 19) that stigma towards health workers “has a negative impact on employee’s perception of their work, and ultimately, their job-satisfaction.” The manuscript suggests that “stigma reduction among health workers and society as whole will improve job satisfaction” This conclusion probably holds true, but given the reason of the stigma vested in the societal attitudes towards drug addicts and sex workers this change will take a very long time to achieve. The reviewer suggests the emphasis is changed to the more immediate actions possible to implement to increase job satisfaction.

2. Under Data collection it is explained that “The group discussions and interviews were developed based on the WHO Human Resources for Health Action Framework” and the reference given is [15]. However, [15] in the reference list seems to be a different source.

3. The sub-chapter on Motivation factors in the Discussion (page 20-21) raises several important topics. This sub-chapter is very important, but the authors have probably not utilized the potential of pulling together the various part of the manuscript and linking the discussion of job satisfaction to the discussion of motivation. The reviewer suggests that the analysis could have been improved if the manuscript had addressed the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The manuscript acknowledges this distinction and at the several occasions this distinction is implied.

4. There seems to be some serious problems with the list of references. The reference list contains 42 references (a fair number for this kind of academic article). The reviewer was very surprised to find references on page 21 listed as [96], [56], [53] and [78].

5. In the Results section, one quote is referred to as “FGD with study facilitators”. Did the study facilitators double as research participants? If so, are these study facilitators included in the study participants reported? The authors should be very careful and ensure accuracy in the reporting of study participants.

Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)
1. The reference to Herzberg is important in this study. On page 16 the authors very importantly address the issue of fairness, and unfairness. The reviewer’s reading of the data suggests that the fairness/unfairness dimension of job satisfaction could have been given more space. A paper discussing perception of fairness is http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21314985, this might be of interest to the authors of this manuscript.

2. The discussion of the difficulties of attracting health workers to working HIV patients is convincing and the elaboration of the specific nature of the HIV pandemic in Vietnam is compelling. The social stigma stemming from health workers’ professional care for HIV patients is probably different in the Vietnamese context than in a sub-Saharan African context where HIV is mainly spread through hetero sexual contact. However, the possible occupational hazard to the health workers remains the same regardless of the cause of the patients’ HIV infection. A short comparison between Vietnam and other countries could be interesting if possible to fit into the manuscript.

3. A very important issue, and certainly belonging under job-satisfaction is the issue of allowances and additional payment to certain groups of health workers. The manuscript provides some information on ‘hazardous allowance’ in the Results section. The practice of providing this allowance to only a group of the health workers inevitably generates a discourse on access to extra payment. This could be given more space in the Discussion. The quote in the last part of the sub-section on “Unsatisfactory compensation” is a bit unclear. Does the informant state that the department ought to make a redistribution, or that the department redistributes these allowances?

4. The Conclusion raises important points, but the nature of the data on which the manuscript is based probably allows a longer and more comprehensive Conclusion. The last part of the first (long) sentence somehow dilutes the important findings of the research. Make the Conclusion stronger, by clearly stating your findings and suggest as clear as possible what you think are the appropriate actions.

5. In the Discussion section, the sub-sections Compensation, Supervision and Work-related stress, all section end with a reference to literature. The discussion of the data could have improved by “summing up” the data and explaining what this study has added to the important body of literature.

6. The section HIV-related stigma is good and a very important contribution in the scholarly debate on health workers’ motivation. Some rewriting of the section is however recommended. The sentences with four references: “Stigma was found to have a significant negative influence on the level of job satisfaction [34, 39] and has even become an impetus for health workers to leave their jobs [40] or to migrate [41].” require more elaboration. The inclusion of these references is only warranted if it is clear how the finding of the current study relate to the referenced literature and vice versa.

7. The FGD participants are referred to as (in the quotes) as Central or
Provincial. Does provincial mean either northern or southern part of Vietnam (as indicated under Methods/settings)?

Minor issues not for publication
1. In the last paragraph on page 5 several theories of job satisfaction are mentioned. Two of these are referred to by (as usual) the authors’ surname. Is there any reason why Paul Spector is referred to by both names? The same applies to the other references to Spector in the manuscript.

2. On page 2 it is explained that Nvivo 9 was used (make sure that the name of the software is NVivo, not Nvivo). On page 6 it is referred to NVivo 8. Please clarify and be consistent.

3. In the paragraph HIV-related stigma the first sentence starts with UNAID, this should be corrected to UNAIDS.

4. One FGD participant doesn’t carry any information on the location, this should be included to ensure consistency in the reporting style.

5. In the Results section it is stated that “We generated four themes related to job satisfaction, which are presented in Table 2.” However, table 2 contains five themes. Is the correct reading that table 2 contains four themes related to job satisfaction plus one theme concerning motivation factors? See also other comments to table 2 about its placement and content.

6. Make sure that the reference list is in accordance with the journal’s requirements (some flaws were observed).

7. What is the purpose of the reference (Molldrem 2009 in Authors contributions (should be Authors’ contributions)? If a reference is needed, why is formatted different from the other references?

8. Why is the name of the country spelled as both Vietnam and Viet Nam in the same document? The reviewer is not qualified to determine which spelling is the correct one, but be consistent through document.

9. The sentence “Many of the participants are involved in precarious work such as concurrent tasks, short-term and part-time engagement in projects due to aforementioned low salaries.” could be made clearer. Although the term ‘precarious work’ may be used, the section would probably benefit from a bit more elaboration on health workers’ strategies when the salary is not sufficient.

10. The reviewer is not familiar with the term ‘emulation’ as it is used in the section on Social recognition. The discussion of recognition is however very important and fits well in the manuscript. The section would benefit from a clarification of what is meant by emulation in this context.

11. The authors discuss the issue of supervision, another very important aspect of job satisfaction. The last two sentences of this paragraph could however be rephrased. The reviewer’s reading of the 2006 World Health Report, page 75 is
that WHO argues strongly for good quality supervision and it is probably this statement which deserves a reference instead of the negative statement appearing in the manuscript.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

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

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests