Reviewer's report

Title: Job satisfaction and retention of healthcare providers: a cross sectional study in Afghanistan and Malawi

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Reviewer: Joost J van der Gulden

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Title and Abstract
One minor remark: change HRH research in human resources in health research.

Background
No remarks. The text is informative and clear.

Methods

Sample and data collection
The authors present a text about informed consent under Sample and data collection. I prefer a new head Informed consent to present these sentences: “The study received human subjects review and approval by the National Health Sciences Research Committee in Malawi, the Afghan Public Health Institute in Afghanistan and by the Western Institutional Review Board in the United States. Informed consent was obtained from all participating providers.”

Measures
Five areas of the work environment have been assessed using 17 items. All further information about these items and the scales used, is presented under Scale development in the Results section which is rather unusual.

Results

Scale development
Some of the Cronbach’s alpha coefficients found are rather low. The authors have to mention this in the Discussion.

On page 8 I found “Job satisfaction was assessed with four items: ....” And: “Three new items were developed for this study to measure intention to stay”.

On page 11, however, I read that the factor ‘solution’, composed of 7 items, was grouped into 2 factors: ‘intent to stay’ and ‘job satisfaction’ by means of principal component factor analysis. This is another procedure than is suggested in the Methods section.

It has my preference to replace (a large part of ) Scale development to the
Methods section.

Bivariate relationships
Most of the correlations found are rather low. The authors have to mention this in the Discussion.

The presentation of findings in the text is not consistent. For Afghanistan correlations and p-values are given, for Malawi no figures or only p-values are presented. The correlations found for Malawi are very low!

Multivariate linear regression
Only 87 health workers were interviewed in Afghanistan. Therefore, I doubt whether it is recommended to include more than 8 or 9 items in the regression models. There is a ‘rule of thumb’ that you need 10 participants per added item. Possibly, more statistically significant associations will be found in a smaller regression model.

It is rather strange that both is in Afghanistan and in Malawi the explained variance of both models regressed is the same.

Discussion
The authors concluded (page 14) that health care providers in both countries are “quite satisfied with their jobs”. On page 15 it is concluded: “while the average respondent in Malawi intended to stay in their position, the average respondent in Afghanistan did not”. Please, present these relevant finding under Results. I can’t find them there!

Some discussion is needed about the quality of data: From page 8 we know that the majority of interviews were conducted face to face with health providers using a standardized, structured questionnaire. In cases where the provider was busy and the schedule required the interviewers to visit another facility, the questionnaire was left with the provider to be self-administered and was collected later by the interviewers. I have some questions:
- Is the quality of the data sampled during interviews comparable with the data obtained from self-administered questionnaires?
- How large is the nonresponse of the questionnaires left behind with ‘busy’ providers?
- Which part of the participants has been interviewed? Which part completed a questionnaire?
- Were the interviewers well-trained to interview these local workers?
- What was done to avoid that the workers answered in a socially desirable way?

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:
I declare that I have no competing interests