Reviewer's report

Title: What elements of the work environment are most responsible for health worker dissatisfaction in primary care rural clinics in Tanzania?

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Reviewer: Sarah Rominski

Reviewer's report:

Overall, this is well-written and interesting paper. I very much enjoyed reading it and I believe it offers important information to the literature. However, I do believe there are some issues which need to be addressed.

Introduction: Paragraph 1, sentences 1, 2 and 3 have no references and need them. Sentence 6 ("Rural areas were particularly underserved.") needs a reference, as well as a number. What is the urban-rural discrepancy in Tanzania?

Paragraph 2, sentence 1 needs a reference. Sentence 2, how is motivation defined? There are many definitions of motivation, and that term needs to be unpacked.

Paragraph 3: what is the training of clinical officers versus nurses versus medical attendants? Are some of them medically trained (as in, have gone through medical school)? Which of these cadres has the most training?

Paragraph 4, sentence 1 ("Given the difficulties in recruiting and retaining rural health workers...") needs contextualization. There is nothing before this sentence indicating that there is a problem recruiting and retaining health workers to rural areas.

Sentence 2 needs a reference. Sentence 3, "starting with previously identified.."; where were these previously identified? What are they?

Method. I think it would be helpful to have a figure of Tanzania and note where in the country the study population is located. How were eligible primary care clinics identified? What was the final number included (the paper states, "from the eligible facilities, primary care clinics with the highest volume...")? What proportion of eligible clinics does this include?

Data collection: The paper notes that a clinic-level survey was conducted. Who answered these questions? The same people as who were surveyed about their motivation?

Data analysis: I am not personally familiar with PCA. Perhaps a little more explanation of the method and how the results are interpreted could be helpful.

"Signal functions" needs a reference, as does the Tanzanian government
guidelines noted on page 8.

Results: It would be helpful to bring some of the information from Table 3 into the text. "Tools to get the job done" such as...

Discussion: A reference for the point made about top-up pay is needed, as is something to support the statement, "cadres who are not given pre-service training and authorization to provide basic emergency obstetric and neonatal care are providing most of the delivery care." I wonder also how the authors know that, "health workers may recognize in-service training as an opportunity to close this gap between their pre-service training and the expectations when they arrive at clinic."

"There is currently a pay-for-performance scheme underway in the region under study and initial evidence demonstrates that this may help motivate staff." This needs a reference, and also a deconstruction of what is meant by "motivate staff". Motivate them to do what? Stay in rural locations? Better performance? Less absenteeism?

I believe that one of the overall findings may be an artifact of bias rather than a true finding: "as providers get older they become inured to working in low-resource environments, which may explain why their increased satisfaction with infrastructure compared to their younger colleagues." This study is cross-sectional. You cannot make these sorts of causal arguments. You note later in the discussion, "this may in part be because satisfied health workers stay longer." I agree completely with this. With this sort of cross-sectional design, there is no way to disentangle those two phenomena. There is a relationship between older age and more satisfaction, but you do not know which way the causality goes.

Conclusion: although I agree with the first sentence of the conclusion, "health system improvements should target areas that will most improve health worker's general job satisfaction", I do not see how this study addresses this.

Overall, I am not clear as the objective of this paper, other than to describe current health worker's motivation. The overall aims of the paper need to be more clearly laid out. The last sentence of the Introduction tries to lay this out, but the last part "identify areas where improvements may substantially affect general job satisfaction..." does not tie into the important part of this. I.e., why do we care about job satisfaction? I believe it is because we want to have more health workers in rural areas as the rural areas are particularly under-served when it comes to workers. However, this link it not made by the authors and needs to be.

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