Reviewer's report

Title: Shaping legal abortion provision in Ghana: using policy theory to inform evidenced-based practice

Version: 2 Date: 1 April 2013

Reviewer: Jane Harries

Reviewer's report:

An interesting paper with some important insights around the contested nature of abortion provision in Ghana. However there are some major problems with the paper mainly relating to Lipsky’s theory -- the information and evidence obtained with is nuanced could have been surfaced with in depth qualitative exploration using a thematic analysis approach and does not necessarily lend itself to policy or system's analysis or if it does the authors have not convincingly applied Lipsky’s framework to show this. As this is a health systems policy journal perhaps it is misplaced.

An ecological model could have surfaced similar issues.

The analysis shows depth and detail and the paradoxes and tensions between doctors and nurses vis a vis the contested nature of abortion underscored by strong religious and moral views around abortion is explored in detail.

The abstract is unclear and needs some editing. It is also very vague-- what analysis, what theory and what policy is being referred to.

Introduction

This section needs more detail about abortion in Ghana - what is the law and legislation with regards to abortion in Ghana this is never explicitly stated.

Also what is the prevalence of unsafe abortion and the MMR in Ghana.

Abbreviations are used MOH GHS without being spelled out

Clearly discuss the law and policy with regards to abortion in Ghana -- this is never clearly spelled out in the entire paper.

Paragraph 3 - states the literature suggests - what literature?

Also explain why Lipsky's theory of street level bureaucrats is so useful for understanding disjuncture between policy and practice - this is the weakest part of the paper.

What observations in the US are the authors referring to wrt to Lipsky final paragraph page 4.

The authors need to show how Lipsky's theory helps to identify the problem - in order to do this far more discussion of his theory needs to be shown.

Literature from Ghana highlights the importance of provider attitudes which are often problematic-- again this is vague and the review of literature on abortion
had some caveats.

Methods
The methods as discussed in this paper lacks rigor. More detail is required about the sampling and socio demographic characteristics of respondents
Was ethical approval obtained to conduct this study?
Who provides abortion who is legally allowed to provide
How were the 43 providers selected - language is confusing refer to workers medical staff midwives and obstetricians what about gynecologists?
More detail is required about the 14 other health providers why were they chosen what types of NGOs why pharmacists etc --

Results
Very interesting but needs some synthesis - at times it appears as if this paper due to its discursive style emanates from a PhD monograph as the style varies in places and is not consistent especially in the discussion section
Discussion
Also needs some tightening and very expansive in parts - some of the discussion could go into the background section to contextualise the information more.
The analysis is interesting and has resonance in other settings - locating some of the discussion in broader debates globally would have been useful - other settings with strong religiosiy such as Latin America.
Page 17 : Not many studies have reported on attitudes of doctors - are the authors referring to Ghana as there is a body of literature both in Africa and elsewhere on providers attitudes towards abortion -
Page 20 with regards to MLPs and provision of abortion and expanding access - please refer to important roles that MLPs provide in SA, Nepal and Vietnam to mention a few refer to Warriner et al 2011 and 2006 in the Lancet.

**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.