Reviewer's report

Title: Determinants of uptake of maternal health guidelines in Kosovo: qualitative study

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Reviewer: Barbara Davies

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Determinants of uptake of maternal health guidelines in Kosovo: qualitative study

The topic of this paper is very interesting and highly relevant for the journal Implementation Science. My level of interest in this paper is high because of an interest in improving maternal health and in better understanding the science of guideline implementation in low and middle income countries. Results that were particularly interesting for me included the need for communication between clinicians and ministry representatives as well as communication across clinical groups. These barriers are apparent in other higher income countries as well.

Major compulsory revisions

None

Minor essential revisions

The title needs attention. The main thrust of the paper is about describing perceived barriers by various groups to the implementation of several guidelines directed at improving maternal health. The word determinants implies that if you just “fix” a few well known factors or “determinants” then magically there will be “uptake”. What does uptake mean? Uptake is a key word in the title yet is not addressed in the discussion section.

The facilitators or drivers of guideline implementation receive little attention in the paper. Is there a table similar to the barriers Table 1 that might be added? Alternatively, might the discussion address this limitation and offer suggestions for future research. Do the authors think that a participatory action methodology might be helpful or not? What were the perceived facilitators? There is one small section on facilitators with only one result about punitive measures. Surely something else might be more viable for facilitation? Where might the next study build from? The barriers seem overwhelming without an equal attention to facilitators. Strongly recommend if data available then include a table with results about facilitators and discuss facilitative strategies to overcome key barriers.

When I read the title, I expected to read a qualitative study but this report is actually an interesting blend of mixed methods with a quantitative descriptive survey reporting means and standard deviations as well as illustrative quotes from participants obtained during interviews and focus groups.

The claim in the abstract about validation of models for guideline implementation
is misleading because this research does not address validation.

I am not convinced that any type of validity can be assessed by showing a survey to 3 clinicians. What is meant by face validity? What about content validity? Is this part of the model validation? What model?

I am pondering about the merits of a survey that questions clinicians about which guidelines from which countries they are aware of, have read or follow? Not sure that this is a useful research approach. Might future research focus more on the actions and behaviors that are required which are substantiated by strong credible evidence to prevent maternal morbidity and mortality such as postpartum hemorrhage (i.e. administration of the drug oxytocin)? These are bigger picture questions that reading this very interesting paper sparked me to think about.

Discretionary Revisions
The finding of “aspirational” recommendations is also very interesting. I agree with the authors in the discussion section about the need for further research about how best to communicate recommendations that are not feasible at a current moment in time but might be important goals to work towards in the future for improvements in health care services in a country. This finding is also relevant to guideline implementation in other countries about various topics.

Decision
Definitely recommend with a few revisions
The results about the impact of a war in 1998-1999 and the examination of guideline implementation while unique to Kosovo also have important practice and research implications for many countries.

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Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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