Reviewer’s report

Title: Women's knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) relating to breast and cervical cancers in rural Zimbabwe: A cross sectional study in Mudzi District, Mashonaland East Province

Version: 1 Date: 11 Jul 2018

Reviewer: J Townsend

Reviewer's report:

This study provides baseline data on knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to breast and cervical cancers in rural Zimbabwe. Having these data are critical for developing and evaluating cancer control programs, and can be helpful to other researchers as well. My specific comments are provided below.

Background:

For international readers, it would be helpful for you to briefly describe the healthcare system in Zimbabwe. You briefly mentioned that a lack of early detection services exist. So, I assume there are no breast and cervical cancer screening programs?

Methods:

1. Was the household questionnaire completed as an interview? If so, please add this detail to the methods section and describe if the interviewers had received any training. Was the questionnaire pilot tested beforehand?

2. How was the survey developed? Please provide specific details about the survey constructs and the measurement scales that were used (seems like Likert scales were used for measuring attitudes).

3. Please provide more details about how you conducted stratified random sampling.

4. How did you ensure data quality with the key informant and focus group data?

5. It may be necessary to weight your survey estimates and use the SPSS procedures that allow for analysis of data collected through complex survey designs, given that you did
stratified random sampling. This is necessary if not everyone had an equal probability of being included in the survey. This frequently occurs when stratification is involved. Otherwise, your variance estimates will not be correct (generally there will be more variance in the sample than what is estimated with a simple descriptive analysis). This in turn will affect any statistical testing done, so that you could have statistical significance when it really does not exist.

6. Was a codebook developed for the qualitative analysis? How many people were involved in this analysis? What methods were used to ensure rigor of the findings (i.e. is it defensible?)

Results:

1. Although key informant interviews and focus groups were done, why aren't the findings presented in this section? If the intent was only to show findings for the survey, I would leave out the qualitative piece in the methods section (although you could mention it was part of a larger study that included a qualitative component).

2. "Attitudes on breast and cervical cancer": Given the low percentage of respondents who disagreed with the statement about "any adult woman, including I, can develop breast and cervical cancer", it actually seems like a positive finding that most women at least had some agreement about this statement. Also, the last two sentences of this paragraph seem to repeat the same findings.

Discussion:

1. Some consideration should be given to discussing the structure of the healthcare system in Zimbabwe. Although VIA is mentioned as a recommended screening modality in Zimbabwe, is there a VIA screening program available to all women? Or, is screening only opportunistic in nature? The findings may not be surprising if there isn't routine screening in place or any public health campaigns going on to increase awareness that cervical cancer is preventable and breast cancer can be detected earlier, when it is more easily treated. However, this study does provide some good baseline data for evaluating future public health activities in this area.

2. Page 6, fifth paragraph, line 43 - 44: The last sentence of this paragraph seems to be overreaching in its conclusion because a study would be needed to test for differences between urban and rural health care practices. Although in reality this may be the case,
other factors could be involved, such as more visits to health care providers and more opportunities for interaction with them.

3. Page 7, last paragraph, line 56: “interrogate” - replace with "evaluate"?

Tables:

1. To protect individual privacy, you may want to combine categories for responses that had only 1 or 2 people responding (e.g. religious affiliation).

2. You may want to consider placing your total sample size within the title itself (e.g. N=409) or somewhere in the table headings, rather than at the bottom. Also, tables 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 should have the total sample size identified.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

I am able to assess the statistics

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Needs some language corrections before being published
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