Reviewer’s report

Title: Knowledge, attitudes and peer influences related to pregnancy, sexual and reproductive health among adolescents using maternal health services in Ugu, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

Version: 0 Date: 06 Feb 2019

Reviewer: Richard McGrath

Reviewer's report:

Overall this is a well written paper covering an interesting topic.

While the paper provides a very useful exploration of adolescents knowledge concerning sexual health issues the consistent use of comparing the studies findings with other studies in Discussion section is not appropriate. For example, findings from the study in relation to smoking knowledge are compared to findings from a study conducted over 10 years ago in Australia with Aboriginal women. The paper indicates the current study findings are lower than the Australian study. While this may be the case, the context and participants in each study need to be taken into consideration. Participants in the Australian study were notably older (60% aged 20-29 years), non-smokers (59%), tertiary educated (45%) and more than half (56%) had been pregnant more than three times. As such comparing findings from the paper's study participants and the Australian study is not appropriate (essentially comparing apples to oranges).

The paper does not a previous study conducted in South Africa in relation to knowledge retained from the Life Orientation course. This is fine but comparisons with other studies conducted in other contexts with very different participant samples should be heavily revised, particularly when judgements are being made in relation to the level of knowledge/understanding of adolescent pregnant women.

Another concern is in relation to the final paragraph in the Conclusion section. There is an argument being put forward regarding the need to initiate early childhood sexual education. As no data was collected in relation to where and how sexual health knowledge was obtained within the study (as area identified as a limitation of the study), it is not appropriate to advocate for education changes based on findings from the study. It could be argued that the Life Orientation course may be effective in relation to some aspects of sexual health knowledge but not in other areas. It could also be argued that other sexual health education/messaging/information tools and techniques are required to further assist with developing (or retaining) sexual health knowledge.
There are a few specific areas that also need further clarification/work on.

1) P.6 indicates participants were excluded if they were identified as having a cognitive impairment. How was this assessed?

2) More information about the Life Orientation course offered as a school subject needed. While this is briefly covered on p.7, it lacks depth. For example, is it a compulsory course? What age group is it delivered to? Is it a standardised course? Some additional information is provided in the Discussion section (p.35) however this needs to be earlier in the paper to establish context in relation to prior knowledge concerning the topics covered in the study.

3) P.8 no need for numbers in brackets (326), (102) & (28). For the latter two (and to be consistent with other aspects of the results discussion, percentages need to be provided.

4) Ensure the use of capitalisation when identifying the Life Orientation course throughout the paper.

5) P.22, line 338 Refrain from referring to participants/respondents as patients.

6) Refrain from using emotive terms (such as Surprisingly (p.22, line 344) in an academic paper.

7) P.35, line 434 amended text from 'danger signs of pregnancy' to 'danger signs during pregnancy'

8) P.35, line 447 amend text 'by on learners'
9) P.36, line 454 Safe motherhood is capitalised in the sentence. Is this a program or an initiative. not sure why this is capitalised.

10) The use of 'Only' to discuss findings in the Discussion section is not consistent. At times 'Only' is used to describe a % greater than 50% (eg. p.36, line 466). 'only' denotes relatively lower percentages. Ensure consistency.

11) P.36, line 470 amend text 'were able to identify'

12) P. 36, line 478 Use of emotive language in relation to participants knowledge concerning signs and symptoms of anaemia. 'It was a concern' is not appropriate in an academic paper.

13) P. 40, line 580. revise text 'HIV and STIs 'can' not will.

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

Yes

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.

No

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:
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