Reviewer’s report

Title: Symptomatic presentation with cervical cancer in Uganda: a qualitative study assessing the pathways to diagnosis in a low-income country

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Reviewer: Laura Marlow

Reviewer’s report:

This is a well written article that presents data collected from women with cervical cancer in Uganda. As the authors point out, the research literature from LMICs is lacking and their contribution to the literature should therefore be welcomed. In general, I think the study appears sound and the methods are well described (although some more detail needed – see below). Interpretation of the findings is adequate and well described in the context of theory and previous research. The authors have completed other studies that were not cited here. Please see some specific comments below.

Major Compulsory Revisions

Introduction:
- Para 2: The authors should acknowledge the contextual differences between the UK and Uganda, i.e. health system set-up
- Para 2, last line: the authors state that “In Uganda... there are few data from qualitative studies assessing help seeking process for cancers” could the authors describe the studies that there are. If there are no studies to discuss here the authors should widen their criteria and describe other studies exploring attitudes to cervical cancer more generally in Uganda or other African countries. For example, they should describe these two studies which seem to be their own work:


- Para 3: Could the authors add a few sentences describing the Andersen model/Model of Pathways to treatment – some readers may not be familiar with these.

Methods:
- How were patients approach about the survey and who by? E.g. approached by a researcher or doctor? Approached before or after a regular appointment?
Approached in the waiting room of the hospital?
- Were all patients at the hospital recruited to the survey? How many were approached? An idea of response rate to the survey would be useful.
- “…we purposively sampled patients who were not too unwell to participate” how was this determined/decided? e.g. by their doctor?
- Were these public/private hospitals – please clarify
- Did the authors plan to recruit in two phases?
- Perhaps add the interview guide as supplementary data.
- “…with the help of two trained research assistants” Trained in what? Please clarify.
- Lines 176-180, regarding the landmark events, where participants asked to use landmark events to recall symptoms/timings etc? Or perhaps this just seemed to happen naturally. Please re-phase or move to the results section if it is a finding rather than something participants were asked to do.
- Where were the interviews based? E.g. In the hospital/At the participant home?
- Line 248/249: Please clarify what is meant by “modest amount of money”. This last sentence seems strange, surely “participants were given an incentive of xx to participate” would be more appropriate.

Results
- Please rephrase line 378/379 “The few respondents who had been screened for cervical cancer and understood their negative result believed they were no longer at risk” – the fact that they believed they were no longer at risk means they did not fully understand the meaning of their screening result.
- Given that this is qualitative, I do not think the authors should use the term ‘respondent’ to refer to women who were interviewed.

Discussion
- The authors should acknowledge participation bias i.e. the more socially motivated women may have been the ones who agreed to participate.

Table 2
- I think the authors should remove the horizontal line that represents the arbitrary boundary or justify why they have included this.

Minor Essential Revisions:
- I think the reflexivity section should be part of the limitations. Using a male interviewer is certainly a limitation.
- I think the authors should delete the last sentence of the first paragraph in the discussion - I feel this plays down the recall bias which is a limitation to the study.
- Table 2: The term TTI is used inn the title and TTD is used in the third column – please clarify.
- Table 2: The headings for columns two and three need to be swapped around.
Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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