Reviewer’s report

Title: "The sun keeps rising but darkness surrounds us": a qualitative exploration of the lived experiences of women with obstetric fistula in Ethiopia

Version: 3 Date: 20 Nov 2017

Reviewer: Alison El Ayadi

Reviewer's report:

Please include all comments for the authors in this box rather than uploading your report as an attachment. Please only upload as attachments annotated versions of manuscripts, graphs, supporting materials or other aspects of your report which cannot be included in a text format.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to review this important manuscript. This qualitative study reports on women’s perceptions on the cause of their obstetric fistula and their experiences living with fistula. There is a substantial amount of data here, and given the neglected nature of this condition, there is a lot of potential for this manuscript. However, as currently written, the manuscript lacks focus. In particular, it is not clear what the overall aim is and what can be achieved through this more nuanced understanding of the conditions of women living with fistula in Ethiopia. I recommend that the authors work to streamline this manuscript, focusing less broadly, and pulling out important recommendations for prevention and intervention. Furthermore, the language will need heavy editing for publication in an English language journal and the document needs to be reviewed for spacing, capitalization, and other errors.

Some specific revision requests follow:

Background

1. Page 2, Line 43: More descriptive than 'problem' would improve this sentence. Furthermore, the first and second sentences here are stating much of the same thing and can be combined.

2. Page 3, Lines 17+: Please make it clear that this data are from Ethiopia. Additionally, the cited DHS data are from 2005 whereas there has been a 2016 DHS in Ethiopia with the fistula module, which would be a better source for contextualizing this.

3. Page 3, Lines 38: Please include more detail on the purpose of understanding the lived experiences of women with obstetric fistula. What does this bring to the evidence base that is unique?
Methodology

1. Page 4, line 57: You indicate purposive sampling was conducted, but the strategy used is not clear. What characteristics were you selecting women based on and why?

2. Page 5, line 47: Please describe how the preliminary code list was developed.

Results

1. The summaries of the themes and subthemes are inadequate. More detail would be useful here to describe the main findings before including the quotations.

2. The data provided in the manuscript is quite broad and I think that reducing the focus of the results section to a more detailed exploration of certain themes and subthemes would be more effective.

Discussion

1. Please revise the conclusions section to exclude presentation of data. This should be in the results and discussion of it within the discussion section.

2. Please discuss how these results can inform public health practice.

3. Short on references and discussion to other contexts.

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.

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.

Not relevant to this manuscript

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

Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

**Declaration of competing interests**
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