Author's response to reviews

**Title:** Medical students are afraid to include abortion in their future practices: in-depth interviews in Maharashtra, India.

**Authors:**

Susanne Sjöström (susanne.sjostrom@ki.se)
Birgitta Essén (birgitta.essen@khh.uu.se)
Kristina Gemzell (kristina.gemzell@ki.se)
Marie Klingberg-Allvin (mkl@du.se)

**Version:** 4  **Date:** 11 September 2015

**Author's response to reviews:** see over
Dear Editor and Reviewers,

Thank you for the time and effort you have spent reviewing our manuscript. We highly appreciate your knowledge of the field and are grateful for your comments.

Addressing your valuable remarks we have revised the manuscript and we hope that you find the resubmitted version improved and that you may now accept it for publication. Please see our detailed responses below.

We have carefully considered your suggested revisions, especially those made by reviewer 2 as . The background section has been subject to a major restructuring using the most recent references. Although we agree that sex selection issues should be beyond the scope of a study on legal abortion performed within the framework of the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, the current situation with decreasing sex ratios due to sex selection need to be considered. The confusion among abortion providers regarding the implementation of the Pre Conception –Pre Natal Diagnostic Technique Act makes it impossible to ignore sex selection as a confounding factor when discussing willingness to provide abortions. This dilemma has been described in previous studies cited in the manuscript (Potdar et al, Ganatra), but has not yet been explored in regard to medical students. The present study was conducted in accordance with the World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki, and permission to conduct the study was obtained locally from the principal at each college. All participants gave their consent in writing. Additional information on ethical consideration has been added to the manuscript.

Both reviewers have commented on the need for language corrections. A language editor has reviewed the manuscript. After careful consideration, we decided to keep the wording of quotes as transcribed verbatim in order not to lose the original meaning and context.

We have also made our best efforts to make sure the manuscript conforms to the journal style. Please see our comments to each reviewer below.

In order for reviewers to evaluate the changes we have made to the manuscript, we refer to the line number in the final manuscript in the response below, and we submit a manuscript with “track changes” in addition to the final reviewed manuscript.

We believe that our findings are important and should be of interest to the readership of BMC Medical Education. There is an urgent need to increase access to safe
abortion care in India. Even though amendments to the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, allowing non physician providers to be trained as abortion providers, are pending, it is important to acknowledge the importance of medical education content in order to make sure that the future physicians, have the right tools and confidence to include abortion provision in their practice.

Kind regards,
Susanne Sjöström
Reviewer 1’s report, with authors’ replies.
Title: Medical students are afraid to include abortion in their future practices: in-depth interviews in Maharastra, India.
Version: 3 Date: 14 July 2015
Reviewer: Nai-peng Tey
Reviewer's report:

- Major Compulsory Revisions
The background will be rearranged and rewritten according to some sequence. Do not include statements that are not related in the same paragraph. E.g. first paragraph in the background section - son preference in the Indian society ...Line 57) is rather detached from the preceding sentences. You may want to begin the next paragraph with a discussion on low contraceptive use, and then son preference to put into context the prevalence of sex selective abortion.

Authors’ reply: Thank you for your suggestion. The background section has been completely modified and special attention was paid to keeping a better sequence. Lines 54-113.

The method section is too brief. I suggest you combine this with data collection and analysis.

Authors’ reply: We have modified the method section according to your suggestion and it now includes the subheadings study design, setting, study participants, data collection, data analysis and ethical considerations Lines 128-192.

The results section should focus on presenting the findings from the interviews and not mix with discussion. I suggest moving a number of sentences from the results section to discussion section.

Authors’ reply: We appreciate your suggestions, and have re-read the section carefully to make sure results are presented without mixing with discussion. Please see our detailed considerations and adjustments regarding each item below.

Ambiguous sentences
Examples
Line 200 - “The respondents’ experiences from the clinical setting confirmed their perception that abortion is illegal.

Authors’ reply: We agree that this needed clarification: we have changed the wording of this sentence. Line 237-240.

Line 212: A 21 year-old girl engineering-student came here (where? ) alone with three weeks amenorrhea (Moreover three weeks amenorrhoea - it is probably too early to determine if one is pregnant or not).
Authors’ reply: Thank you for your valuable comment. We have made careful considerations and decided, despite our ambition not to change the wording of the quotes in order not to lose the context, that we should adjust the wording in order to illuminate that the student describes an incident at the present clinic. We have also added a comment in [ ] in the quote to clarify that the respondent means three weeks since the woman expected her period, when he uses the wording three weeks amenorrhea. We agree that although this is still early, it would be equivalent to gestational week 6-7 when many educated women, who keep track of their periods 28 days/ 4 weeks, would have noticed that the period is late (especially if they have had unprotected intercourse). Also, by 6-7 weeks of gestation, most women experience some symptom of pregnancy such as nausea or breast tenderness. Lines 250-254.

Line 225-226 Observing physicians’ dependability supported this lack of clinical confidence, and fear about taking their own decisions.

Authors’ reply: Following your suggestion, this sentence has been moved to the discussion. Lines 414-416.

Contradictory statements
Examples –
Line 176-179 The legal conditions for providing medical termination of pregnancy were often correctly cited, but the students also included prerequisites perceived necessary to protect the provider such as obtaining consent from the woman’s husband or parents, even when she was not a minor (second part implies wrong interpretation of the law”.

Authors’ reply: Thank you for this valuable comment. We want to highlight the contradictory nature of the students’ response. To clarify this to the reader, we have rephrased the paragraph and added an additional comment in the discussion section. Lines 206-219 and 374-382.

Irrelevant sentences
Line 251-257

Authors’ reply: We have carefully considered your suggestion. We find that this quote demonstrates the student’s lack of knowledge about abortion methods as she suggests that dilatation and curettage is a good method. It also illustrates that dilatation and curettage is still commonly used in the Indian setting, although not recommended by the WHO or in the National Guidelines. The student does not suggest MVA as an alternative to medical abortion. Lines 289-295.

Line 277-279,

Authors’ reply: We have carefully considered your suggestion but we find that this quote demonstrates the students’ overall impression that abortion is illegal and the complexity of the legal and societal aspects that affect their attitudes. Lines 319-321.
Line 287-289 - not quite relevant to the topic under study.

Authors reply: We have discussed and contemplated your suggestion and we believe that this quote demonstrates the student’s alienation towards rural people, and also describes how his perception has developed during his years in medical education. The duality of Indian society often described as “there are two India” is of importance to the student’s feeling of a social distance towards the rural people. We have reworded the paragraph hoping to clarify this to the reader. Lines 332-337.

Pay attention to choice of words - e.g. Line 156 - the findings is supported by three sub themes - I suggest you it to "the findings are discussed under three sub-themes.

Authors’ reply: Thank you for your suggestion that we have carefully considered and discussed. Using the inductive approach in thematic data analysis, codes were collected into potential subthemes, then subsequently gathered into themes and a “thematic map” was created. Therefore we find it more appropriate to use wording support to describe the nature of the findings. Braun et al. Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology 2006, 3:77-101. Line 179.

Not all the respondents were cited. Some respondents were not identified - e.g. in line 179, 208, 222, 239, 285. It will be better to identify them such as informant number xx,

Authors’ reply: We have carefully considered your suggestions. In order to limit the length of the manuscripts in qualitative research, is not possible to cite all respondents. We have used the quotes that we find best illustrates our findings. Regarding the shorter in-text citations, we find that adding information about the individual respondent impairs readability. We chose to limit the number of shorter in-text quotations and omitted all except the ones on line 216, 261 and 277.

Findings from this study are limited and cannot be generalized. It is better to treat this as a case study in Maharastra.

Authors’ reply: Thank you for your suggestion. This has been considered in the section methodological considerations, line 445-446.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published.
Authors’ reply: We have revised the language.

Declaration of competing interests:
'I declare that I have no competing interests'
Reviewer 2’s report with author replies.

Title: Medical students are afraid to include abortion in their future practices: in-depth interviews in Maharastra, India.
Version:3 Date:25 July 2015
Reviewer: RAJIB ACHARYA

Reviewer's report:
Major compulsory revisions
1. The background section should be consolidated by using newer data on abortion and maternal mortality in India. Authors are using quite old statistics, however new information is available from RGI and other sources. Also since the authors are taking up issues like task shifting, they need to provide context and recent developments should be discussed. Needs major overhaul. The issue of safe abortion is muddled with the confusion with sex selective abortion in India and that needs to be stated in this section for readers to understand some of the some of the findings and discussion later on.
Authors’ reply: Thank you for your valuable comment. We have made systematic searches in the literature and reviewed available data. The background section is rearranged and rewritten using this information according to your suggestions. Lines 54-113.

2. Please indicate local ethical approval under "Ethical consideration".
Authors’ reply: We have added information in the Methods section under the subheading Ethical considerations. The study was conducted in accordance with the World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki and written approval was obtained from the local review board signed by the principal at each college. Furthermore the study has been reviewed and approved by the Regional Ethical Review Board in Stockholm, Sweden 2013/415-31/4. Lines 187-192.

3. Under "Abortion is illegal in society" - both the quotes cites are not related to the sub-theme, they don't support the argument made by the authors. Need supporting quotes.
Authors’ reply: In order to clarify the meaning we have changed the title of this subtheme to “Pre-martial sex and abortion is regarded as illegal by society”. Also, clarifications have been made in the text. Line 298-321.

4. Under "social distance" - what is the argument in the quote? Students don't want to provide any services in rural areas, or they don't want to provide 'abortion services' in the rural areas - need to change this quote or clarify.
Authors’ reply: To make the meaning clearer to the reader we have reworded the paragraph and changed the title of the theme to “Negative attitudes toward the rural community” The quote illustrates the division of the Indian society, and explains how the respondent changed from feeling a part of his village to distance himself from the people there lines 330-335.

5. Under "future access to safe abortion" - again the quotes do not support
authors' arguments. Nurses are already providing contraceptive services so that's nothing new or nothing new to add to services. Need to modify or cite new quotes.

Authors’ reply: Thank you for your suggestion. We have modified the title of the theme to “Attitudes toward task shifting in comprehensive abortion care” and reworded the paragraph for clarification. One of the quotes has been substituted. We have also added an explanation in the first quote to illuminate what the respondent meant, and edited the language in the last quote. Lines 351-363.

Minor compulsory revision
1. Under "study participants" authors say that 4 government and 2 private medical colleges were sampled from urban and rural areas. What did the authors’ mean by medical college in rural areas? How is rural defined in such case? As far as my knowledge goes all medical colleges are in urban areas/towns.

Authors’ reply: We agree that this wording might be inappropriate and have adjusted according to suggestion and rephrased using peri-urban instead of rural, one of the colleges refers to itself as rural. Lines 148 and 172.

2. Under "study participants" please delete "A few had been sexually active" - I think this information is redundant to this paper unless authors hypothesise that being sexually active would have modified their views.

Authors’ reply: Thank you for your comment. We have considered your suggestion but decided to keep the information in the manuscript as previous research has shown that medical student attitudes on abortion are influenced by their experience of relationships and of sexual intercourse. Wheeler et al. Attitudes and intentions regarding abortion provision among medical school students in South Africa Int Perspect Sex Reprod Health 2012, 38(3):154-163.

3. Is Pune a coastal city?
Authors’ reply: We agree and have modified the text, line 171.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being Published
Authors’ reply: Please see above.

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