Author’s response to reviews

Title: Still a moral dilemma: How Ethiopian professionals providing abortion come to terms with conflicting norms and demands

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Author’s response to reviews:

Dear Editor,

we are grateful for the reviewers' positive evaluation of our manuscript. We here submit a version which has been revised in accordance with the reviewer comments. Please find below our response to the comments:

Stephen Smith, Ph.D. (Reviewer 1): Thank you for the opportunity to read this article. It was very interesting. I think the article makes a contribution to the literature, is generally well-written (although there are some grammatical errors which will need cleaning up) and the conclusions seem reasonable from the evidence. I do not have the methodological expertise to know whether there are any problems in the study design, but it seems to me to be a standard interview-based study. I think a more detailed analysis of those interview participants who took the position that supporting abortion was in keeping with their religion but that is probably a better topic for a different paper. So, that is merely a suggestion for future publications rather than a critical comment on this one.

The only minor point I would make is that it would probably be helpful to include a rough currency conversion when discussing the payment (to something like dollars, euros or Great British pounds). It is not required but would probably help an international audience who might not have a good idea the relative amount that was provided to the interview participants.

Our response: A conversion to euros has now been added.

Jennifer Thomson (Reviewer 2): This is a clear and concise study, that adds to our understanding of how abortion policy is playing out in Ethiopia. It is well written, makes conclusions appropriate to its scope and has a clear methodological framework.

Before publication, however, the below points should be addressed. Some of these are fairly minor, related to words and phrasing, others require some reframing of the text:

pg 5 - countries with other faith traditions (notably India, predominantly Hindu) also see key
controversies around abortion.

Our response: An important point – accordingly, our specification of “Christian and Muslim” faith traditions has now been removed (p. 4).

pg 5 - 'African leaders agreed', not 'African leaders have agreed'; pg 6- 'revised guideline' should read 'revised guidelines'; pg 7 - organisation spelt incorrectly

Our response: This has now been corrected.

pg 7 - mention is made of a study 'with many similarities to ours' - what are they? This needs more explanation.
Our response: We have now specified: “A recent study from Addis Ababa which parallels ours in involving interviews with abortion providers …”

pg 8 - 'highlighted experienced dilemmas' - I am unsure what is meant here, I think this needs to be rephrased

Our response: We have now rephrased the sentence. (“A national survey of physicians working in Ethiopian public hospitals showed that the respondents often experienced dilemmas related to reproductive health issues”)

Methods - this section doesn't say what the total number of interviewees was? I can infer that it was 30, but these needs to be stated somewhere in this section.

Our response: We have now specified that there were 30 interviewees.

pg 11 - you say that 'more than half of participants hesitated, finding it difficult to answer while others were quite clear on what their views were' - this seems to be giving a motivation to interviewees' hesitation but with no evidence that this was the case? I think this should be removed, or clearer evidence added. What evidence, if any, do you have that they found it 'difficult' to answer?

Our response: We have now replaced the claim with a much more modest claim: “We noted that when asked to give their view on when life begins, what moral value the fetus has and when it acquires a right to life, many of the participants hesitated and took time before answering.”

pg 16 - you say that 'not all the participants have given the issue that much thought' - but the interview data seems to suggest differently?

Our response: We have replaced this claim with a more modest and nuanced interpretation: “One interpretation of the contradictions and hesitation seen with several of the participants is that not all the participants have given the issue that much thought.”

pg 18 - 'genuine difference' - unclear what you mean by this?

Our response: We now write “substantial”.

pg 18 - sentence that starts 'It might be..' - this seems to undercut your method as presented above - perhaps say that in future research, the questions should be framed differently?
Our response: We have now added that “Perhaps in future research the questions should be framed differently.”

pg 18 - 'introduced into the reasoning' - I think this could be reworded as it is unclear

Our response: We have now rephrased.

limitations section - part of this detail might be added to the methods section to explain the wording of questions etc. I think it would fit more clearly there.

Our response: We have considered this advice but have decided to keep the relevant sentences in the Limitations section, as they mostly repeat information from the Methods section but discuss how the factors might have led to weaknesses in the study.