Reviewer’s report

Title: Herpes labialis and Nigerian dental healthcare providers: knowledge, attitude, behaviour and refusal to treat

Version: 2 Date: 26 December 2014

Reviewer: Vahid Rakhshan

Reviewer's report:

All the following points are request for Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?

The introduction should focus more on the clinicians’ refusal to treat patients with herpes, instead of explaining the herpes and its pathology. The first two paragraphs should be condensed to a couple of lines. Then new relevant content should be added to the introduction regarding the potential hesitation of dentists in treating patients with herpes labialis or patients suffering from other infectious diseases (as well as the consequences of this hesitation).

The authors are recommended to detail on the null hypotheses.

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2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?

The current methods part is needs to be better by revising the text according to these suggestions:

A. what was the sample size? How the sample size was determined? Was it predetermined based on a pilot study? Or what else?

B. how the thresholds for stratifying the scores were determined? For example, why the age 28 was selected as the threshold for dichotomizing the age variable? Why the knowledge scores below 8 were considered poor knowledge and 8 and above were considered adequate? How those numbers were determined?

C. how many patients were initially evaluated? How many of them did not return the questionnaires?

D. The authors should use the STROBE checklist and also fill and submit the checklist with the revision.

E. the text can benefit from proper subheadings. Also I think the text would be more fluent, if the questionnaire items were reported not briefly within the text,
but as a separate table with all the questions (eventhough they are a repetition of
the questionnaire used in a previous cited study of Kanjirath et al).

F. The sample size looks rather small for a questionnaire study.

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3. Are the data sound?

The data are fine and the presentation is detailed and appropriate when it comes
to tables. Subheadings in the results can benefit the fluency as well.

However the *analysis* can be improved.

A. In the current report, every ranked or continuous variable (like the scores, age)
are dichotomized before being analyzed. Although this is a common practice, it
results in huge data loss, which is not favorable for researchers who have put a
lot of time on data collection. It also reduces the value of the analyses.

So I would like to suggest the authors to do the followings: 1. Besides their
current report which is good, they should also report the descriptive statistics for
the variables in their original format. For example, they should report the
average, standard deviation, median, minimum, and maximum age of the
participants. The same for knowledge scores, etc. should be followed. 2. The
authors should also use the original data (before being dichotomized) in their
analyses (as new analyses besides the current analyses which are good). 3. The
best practice would be to make the *RAW DATA* available as an online
appendix or as a large table within the paper. I mean the Raw Data in its original
form, and before being dichotomized.

B. A question regarding the table 4: Did the authors use the original ranked data
as the independent variables in the regression? Or did they use the dichotomized
variables? These should be clarified. Also the variable references should be
stated. For example, what does a positive sign (in Table 3) or an OR less than
1.0 (in Table 4) mean for marital status? Does a positive association favor being
single or being married?

C. In the results, 3 tables are cited, while there are 4 tables.

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4. Do the figures appear to be genuine, i.e. without evidence of manipulation?

Not applicable.

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5. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data
deposition?

The authors should use the STROBE checklist and address its items within the
text. They should also submit a filled STROBE checklist with their revision.
6. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

A. The current discussion is difficult to follow at some points (especially when repeating the results). At many points, it is only a long interpretation of the results. The discussion needs to be revised to a much more organized and fluent text.

B. The current discussion seems more of a narration of the results of this study and a few other studies, without discussing their contrasts and similarities except at few points (only the percentages of refusal to treat). There are numerous variables assessed in this study. The authors should *compare* their findings with relevant findings of other studies. And they should make sure their discussions are balanced and supported by the data.

C. The references are mostly old, and there are only a few references that are directly relevant to the topic and also are fresh (2010 and later). A digital search shows numerous recent studies on knowledge, attitude, and practice (or behavior) of dentists and other health personnel towards infectious diseases. They should be cited, compared, and discussed properly.

D. There are certain sentences that need references. For instance, this sentence “Refusing treatment to patients whose infective status is definitive is not only unethical but also illogical since undiagnosed carriers of infectious disease pass undetected through practices and clinics on the daily basis”.

The authors should cite references for such declarative sentences. The authors should cite any reference that was originally used to deduce sentences like the one quoted above. This is essential. No content borrowed from a previous study or inspired from a previous study should be left without acknowledging the source. Some contents are originally suggested by the authors. As long as there is a relevant reference to substantiate that sentence, even such sentences that are not borrowed from previous studies should have a reference in order to improve their value (unless there is no relevant reference, and in case of the specific above-quoted sentence, there *are* relevant references in the literature).

E. The conclusions need to be revised. The last sentence should be moved to the discussion. There are other valuable findings that can be listed as conclusions. It is better to state all the key findings in separate lines. Also when stating the determinants, it is better to state that *how* a specific determinant affect the outcome? For example, instead of naming the marital status as a determinant, it is better to state are single doctors more prone to refuse to treat or married doctors?
7. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?

No limitation is stated. The authors are suggested to look at the “limitation” sections of the following articles and similarly address the limitations of their study in terms of reliability, generalizability, etc. especially, the following findings suggest that dentists’ self-claimed behavior does not necessarily accord with their real behavior, and this should be as well addressed as a limitation.


8. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?

It seems so. However, they should make sure no sentences remain without proper substantiation by citing relevant references. Currently some sentences are not backed up.

9. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?

The abstract should be completely revised. Key elements like the sample size and demographics and details on method of data collection are missing. The conclusion of abstract should be rewritten, bearing the main findings (the determinants of refusal to treat) in mind.

It also needs a language revision.

10. Is the writing acceptable?

Grammar: The text needs to be revised thoroughly by a native English speaker.

Scientific writing: The text should be redecorated to a much more organized and fluent one. The current text is difficult to follow at some points.

Also the STROBE should be followed.
Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests