Reviewers report

Title: Improving Emergency Obstetric Referral Systems in Low and Middle Income Countries: A qualitative study in a tertiary health facility in Ghana.

Version: 0 Date: 01 Sep 2019

Reviewer: Philip Tabong

Reviewer's report:

Improving emergency obstetric referrals in developing countries: A qualitative study in a tertiary health facility in Ghana

General comments

This is a very important study; addressing issues concerning the three delays have long been identified as topical in reducing maternal mortality. Hence this study adds to literature in this important subject matter. The authors have identified a critical gap in literature which their study sought to fill. However, a few additions will make the manuscript stand out.

Abstract

This section is generally well written.

Background

The authors have clearly stated the problem being investigated and have adequately explained the background to the problem. The background has depicted, clearly the burden of maternal mortality in the world and, with the help of statistics from published works, the authors assert that Ghana is faced with challenges in reducing maternal mortality as the country could not achieve the Millennium Development Goal 5. By the end of the background the authors have argued, logically that referral system is important in addressing the two of the three delays in maternal health care.

Method:

In the methodology, the authors indicated that they employed qualitative research methodology. Specifically, the authors used case study approach. However given the nature of the study and the primary study population, one can conclude that phenomenology is a more appropriate study design than case study. The authors' interest was for the study participants to share their "lived experience" as required in phenomenology. I think the case study as used by the authors here
refers to choice of what has been studied (patients, relative and staff of Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital) but not a case study as a qualitative study methodology (design). I will therefore recommend that this distinction be made clear. A section on study design should be added where the authors should clearly state that phenomenology was used. The procedure used in selecting participants, data collection strategies, and analysis as described in this article is that of phenomenology.

Again, it would be important to provide the background of the health research assistants since interviews are social interactions and positionality plays an important in that. Were they working in the same unit the participants were sampled?

The interview guide was designed in English but some participants were interviewed in local language (Twi and Ga). What measures were put in place to ensure consistency? Was any training organized? Were the Tool translated into local language before the interview? The interview guides should also attached as supplementary file to this manuscript. Was member checking done to ensure quality of the data collected?

Results

It would be important to add the background information of the participants to support the illustrative quotes. This will put the illustrative quotes in context and also show variability in the illustrative quotes. I am sure the authors have collected background information on the study. These could be summarized in a table. After each illustrative quote, the authors should then indicate background of the voice behind the quote. This is very important in understanding the illustrative quote.

Discussion

The discussion is balanced.

Conclusions

The conclusions are based on the findings of this research and hence are justified. The recommendations are also justified because they emanate from the results of the study.

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:

Acceptable

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