Reviewer’s report

Title: Consequences of armed conflict on maternal and reproductive health in post-conflict Africa: A qualitative study of Burundi and Northern Uganda

Version: 1 Date: 20 November 2014

Reviewer: Emma Plugge

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All recommendations below are Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
No. The authors state it is to ‘explore the effect of armed conflict on MRH in Burundi and Northern Uganda’. This is a very broad question and it seems subsequently that the researchers are actually focusing on issues around health services rather than health more broadly. Their focus is also on key stakeholder perceptions. They need to be explicit about this. In addition, having highlighted the differences in the conflicts, they need to provide a good reason why they then recruited participants from very different conflicts to one study.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If the question posed can be better defined then the methods might be appropriate. However, there would be an argument to include quantitative research as well if examining the very broad topic of the effects of armed conflict on MRH.

3. Are the data sound?
This is difficult to judge. The methods section is very brief and it would be good to see further detail (COREQ compliant) about how participants were approached, where the groups were run, etc. The results section needs considerable restructuring and further thought. At present, the findings are presented as if ‘short’ and ‘long-term’ effects were themes emerging from the data rather than how the researchers have chosen to categorize the data. Indeed, it is difficult to discern the themes that have been grouped under ‘short-term effects’. There is also repetition for example for high fertility and teenage pregnancy. This suggests the categorization of ‘short’ and ‘long-term’ may not be very helpful.

Also problematic are statements such as ‘the number of facility deliveries and births attended by skilled personnel fell sharply during the conflict’ (lines 282-283) within the text of the results. Such a statement is surely not a finding of the qualitative research and therefore not appropriate here. There are other examples of this with the results section too – statements are made and it is not clear the source of evidence to support them.

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

5. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
No. I recommend the authors look at the COREQ statement and ensure that all items on the checklist have been included.

6. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
No, the discussion is poorly structured and unclear. The key results are not clearly highlighted and discussed with relevance to the literature. The strengths and limitations section is very weak and needs further development.

7. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
No, as noted above, there is a very brief paragraph on the limitations. I would expect a much fuller description of the limitations of a study such as this, discussing issues such as data validity and generalizability as a bare minimum.

8. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
Yes, however, as noted above, this is poorly organized.

9. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
The title is fine as it stands. The abstract needs revising to demonstrate the key findings and learning points.

10. Is the writing acceptable?
In most areas, yes. However, they should avoid use of words such as ‘dire’ and be more cautious in their assertions.

The authors present some of the findings from an interesting study but need to work hard on the manuscript for it to be publishable. They need to refine the aim of the study and justify why qualitative methods were used and why they chose two areas close geographically but where very different wars had been waged. The methods section needs further detail but both the finding and discussion in particular need substantial development.

**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

**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