Reviewer's report

Title: Rethinking obstetric violence and the “neglect of neglect”: the silence of a Labour Ward milieu in a South African district hospital

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Reviewer: Andrea Solnes Miltenburg

Reviewer's report:

I wish to congratulate the authors on this manuscript and research performed. The authors address an important topic which they refer to as obstetric violence, synonyms are disrespect and abuse in childbirth, mistreatment of women, disrespectful maternity care. Indeed a topic which has become of interest, and several papers have been published recent years. I wish to commend the authors for attempting to understand and describe the violence that is the whole lot of 'nothingness' in settings as such in KH. It is easier to define, describe and attempt to measure and perhaps change, when there is a clear and direct violent act, however as the authors point out there is 'something' in the environment, or the milieu' which creates situations that without such clear acts, still can be seen as violence. I believe the authors have attempted to address several important issues, however I find there are several areas where the manuscript can be improved.

1. With regards to the ethnography, I believe it is essential for the main researcher, 'the I person' to identify themselves, their profession, in which position was he/she working at KH for all these years. This is important to understand the authors positioning and relation to the research topic. And in particular it can inform the reader on why the author is asking his/herself certain questions.

2. The setting is described, however the authors reflect several times on how good the quality of obstetrics care is in KH, technically or medically, yet they provide no evidence for this. I believe it is important the authors describe some essential demographics and indicators. Especially since the authors did collect some data from the hospital over a period of months. What is the CS rate? What is the induction rate? Case fatality rate? Stillbirth rate? etc.

3. The authors have done interviews with several different types of target groups, both patients, doctors, nurses, however in the quotes it is often not clear who is talking. It would be helpful to have the available after each quote. For example Mrs D, nurs-midwife XX years old.
4. I find the findings section difficult to follow, and it is not always easy to identify the structure that the authors intend to adhere to. The quotes don't always seem to fit with the preceding or following text. And I fail to understand the meaning of some of the descriptions, for example at the first paragraph regarding the doctors office and nurses tea room. Also several comments or statements are made, without clarification how this was interpreted. For example 'the nursing station doesn't elude warmth or acceptance' (P13, line 5) - it needs description which illustrate this. Much of such an interoperation also depends on personal point of reference. Another example which needs to be rephrased or explained is 'the doctor felt very alone... walked from room to room' (p14 line 41). How does the authors know how the doctor feels? Was this something that was spoken about, is this the authors interpretation of the doctor, if so, how? On what basis etc. There are many of such descriptions in the text which make you question the trustworthiness of the findings. Needs to be thoroughly reviewed and rewritten. Overall the findings section seem like a list of themes which are elaborated upon here and there, without having a proper story line.

5. The author speaks of women and staff being severely traumatises, but fail to explain what this means. It is not evident in the findings that this is the case, other than what is referred in the background and setting, but these do not specifically relate to the context in KH, nor to those interviewed.

6. The discussion and conclusion seem a sum up rather than reflection of the findings, also several statements and claims are made without sufficient support from the findings. Or at least, it lacks clarity of on which basis the author can make such claims. 'P21, line 34' the powerlessness - there is just not enough depth in the findings for the authors to make this claim.

7. The literature to which is referred and the framework and theory are interesting and fitting, although I believe it would be appropriate to refer to Farmer and perhaps Galtung when referring to structural violence.

8. I really love the last sentence in the manuscript 'as a way a system defends itself... etc' , and would even like to use it as a quote for my own work, because I so well understand what the authors mean with it. However, again I would like to ask the authors to work on their findings section to strengthen this statement.
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

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