Author’s response to reviews

Title: Intersectionality and global health leadership: parity is not enough

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Author’s response to reviews:

Dear reviews,

We thank all three of the reviewers for their feedback on our manuscript. Overall, we are pleased that all of the reviewers find the topic important and timely, that the second reviewer is only suggesting an additional short paragraph, and that the third reviewer recommends it for publication after some very minor linguistic edits. In this response to reviewers we address each of the comments in turn, referencing edits made to the body of the manuscript (edits in the manuscript are highlighted in yellow). In response to the more major comments from reviewer 1, we have incorporated as many of the valuable amendments as possible, while sticking broadly to word limit and format of a commentary.

Reviewer #1:

Reviewer comment 1) Please provide more details of the literature review. A precise, operational definition of "intersectionality" as pertaining to the literature review remains lacking. As described, it is impossible for a researcher to independently replicate the findings of the review, and to eventually update it. The rationale for the review's economic focus (LMICs) was not clearly articulated, since the constructs and issues are presented in a fragmented manner and do not logically lead to a particular focus. It is especially unclear where "the 'white women from the West' benchmark" fits within the operationalization of the literature review, or even what
researchers and policy makers would be able to take away for future work in this area (as echoing a concern raised by the previous reviewer). Moreover, the citations within the article itself are sometimes deficient. Care has not been taken to cite original sources. This shortcoming starts with the article's first sentences; the statistic on the global health workforce gender ratio is attributed to a source but which itself is citing another source.

Response: The aim of this commentary is not to focus on the literature review and the reference made to it is simply to emphasize the point the authors are making. A full report of the literature review itself, that would also allow for replicating the findings of the review is under final revisions to be submitted for publication purposes. We have tried to keep this commentary in line with the criteria for submission of a commentary to the Human Resources for Health Journal.

Intersectionality as an approach, helps us to understand and acknowledge the complexity of people's lives and how different social locations intersect to create unique experiences and positionalities for individuals.

White woman from the West benchmark is a phrase that the author is using to draw attention to where the focus around gender equity has been traditionally on. It has been removed from the body of the manuscript due its potential for confusion.

The original references have been cited now.

Reviewer comment

2) Revise the commentary to also cover (and critically discuss) their concept [of "intersectionality"] with other concepts/theories. The authors fail to convince this reader of the importance of "intersectionality" because of the article's failure to clearly define how it is (or should be?) operationalized in the existing research (see comments above) and, in turn, how such an approach would inform health workforce policy and practice better than other approaches.

Response: We have included some further suggestions for implementation of intersectionality in health workforce policies in paragraph 6 of the body of the commentary. When discussing intersectionality, we are not advocating for this concept to replace an opposing concept; rather raising awareness about a framework that can complement the quest for gender equity. Therefore, we have not critically discussed other theories.

3) The commentary needs to be expanded and include (...) [how intersectionality] could be explored. The authors claim in their response they have ideas and questions in the final paragraph, but the article's final paragraph is essentially a quote and an opinion, lacking research
operationalization. In this paragraph or the preceding one, there are no articulated research questions, research designs or evidence-informed priorities specifically related to human resources for health.

Response: In keeping with the commentary structure and aims, we have not aimed for research operationalization per se, rather informing the reader about this concept that is increasingly featuring in the global health discourse. Nevertheless, we have added four research questions into the second to last paragraph to point to potential priority areas for research, as well as concrete policy and practice implications for global health.

Reviewer 2#: I would like hence to see a short paragraph explaining few concrete policy and practice steps that could already be addressed now at international and national level to further gender equitable global health leadership. perhaps one or two of the future "research needs" recommendations can be amended in this form? Hope this reflection can be included. Wishing you good luck with the final submission.

Response: Thank you. We have added some research questions (as also noted above in response to reviewer 1), and some practical policy options to the last part of the commentary.

Reviewer 3#: This is a well-written commentary addressing an important issue which carries the potential to act as a starting-point for further research on the issues which it raises. I am happy to recommend it for publication. I just have some very minor suggestions for linguistic tidying, as follows: p.2 (first page of body of text), ln 39, replace 'welcomed' with 'welcome'; p.3, ln. 34, replace 'not a single' with 'not one'; p.3, ln. 37, replace 'which were indexed' with 'as indexed'; p.3, ln. 46, delete 'using'; p.3, ln. 55, the use of the word 'underexplored' does not make sense in the context of that sentence. Replace with 'needed', 'necessary', or similar; p. 4, ln. 5, insert comma after 'historical'.

Response: We thank you for your keen observation, the edits have been made.