Reviewer's report

Title: Mothers-in-law's role in antenatal care decision-making in Nepal: A qualitative study

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Reviewer: ernestina coast

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NB: MIL = mother-in-law

The authors tackle an understudied issue – the role of the mother-in-law – in decisions to seek ANC in Nepal. It is an important area of study, not just in Nepal, but other socio-cultural contexts where the mother-in-law’s status affords her considerable power over her daughter-in-law. Their approach – using qualitative methods – is an appropriate one – in order to uncover the meanings and processes around decisions to use ANC.

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

- Major Compulsory Revision

The question(s) are not clearly articulated in order that the reader can clearly assess whether (and how) they have been answered. The article hints at the research question(s) but falls short of clear and explicit articulation (p5) “none of the studies has examined in-depth the role of mothers-in-law in ANC, for example how and under what circumstances they affect the decision-making process around ANC?” – these hint at the research questions addressed in the article but are not set out unambiguously.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?

- Major Compulsory Revision

Broadly, the methods are appropriate – a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews prefaced by a semi-structured questionnaire. Their justification and description are not well described, and would require revision for publication:

- how was the sample size decided and justified?
- Some information on the geographic location of this research would be useful (beyond urban-rural in Nepal)
- P.6 query category descriptions – should users versus non-users instead read as “ever-users versus never-users”? The two category groupings are distinct and need clarification. For example, a 2+ parity woman included in the study could have had ANC for child #1 and no ANC for child #2 – would she be defined as a non-user in this study?
- It is unclear how (p.6) “education, age, ethnicity and religion of respondents were also considered while selecting the sample”, given a sample size of 30 women, divided into two groups for ANC non/use.
- No information given on response/refusal rate
- No information given on how the husbands and MILs were selected (not selected on the basis of the women who were selected – otherwise there would have been approx. 30 of each?)

3. Are the data sound?

- Major Compulsory Revision

The authors do address the issue of language inasmuch as the first author is a native speaker of the language of the interviews. However, there is insufficient detail for a reader to determine the quality of the data (including their translation). For example, was a sample of interviews translated by someone else for cross-checking? If not, then this should be highlighted as a limitation. Is there any assessment of the quality of the translation done by the author? For example, p.10 “…Well people in maternal home understand more…..”

p. 17 “…carrying her (keeping together) all the time…” – are these brackets the authors’, in which case the typography should reflect this clarification

Table 1
- no explanation given for meanings in caste categories e.g.: Tamang versus Newar
- what does the variable “Number of children” refer to, and why is it relevant for this study? Number of pregnancies? Number of live births? The quality of these data as they are reported raises doubts for the reader, especially the inclusion of the unusual category “Lost child”. The other categories are hard to read, including “children up o 2”
- what is the variable “Number of family”, and why is it relevant for the study?
- no data are presented that link the socio-demographics of the other respondents – husbands and MIL to the women. This would appear to be a major oversight of the authors, given that comparison of dissonance between husband-wives or MILs-daughter-in-law – that would have been useful for this study to tease out

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

The data are anonymised but no information available regarding data deposition (although copies of the research instruments are made available)

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

Major Compulsory Revision
- the authors do not identify the criteria for inclusion/exclusion of quotes drawn from their data in the article. There is heavy reliance on quotes in the results/analyses section of the paper, but the reader is not told why these quotes
were selected in particular.
- the paper would benefit from greater reflection (and critical comparison with the broader literature) of the themes that emerge and less reproduction of verbatim quotes
- throughout this article there is little sense of triangulating (even if this involves putting qualitative findings against quantitative data from elsewhere) the findings. For example, p. 20, “most MILs assume ANC requires lots of time waiting in a queue” – is there any evidence from elsewhere about waiting times at ANC clinics?

p.24 “At the policy level…..care in Nepal” – but the authors offer no insights as to how this might be achieved in terms of service delivery or intervention or programme or information-education-communication. Are there no comparable examples from other countries that might be demonstrated as useful exemplars?

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
There is a separate limitations section in the paper. The paper would be improved if the approach to limitations were more reflective, for example, suggesting how these limitations might have impacted on the data, their analyses, and ultimately the conclusions.

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

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

9. Is the writing acceptable?
Yes - with minor essential revisions

p.3 “is estimated at 281 deaths per 100,000 ….which is one of the highest [WHAT?] in the world”

p.4 “A number of studies…” This statement is very vague is referencing a systematic review. It would be preferable to cite the studies on which the evidence is based.

p.4 “Limited resources and administrative capacity with strong underlying needs for health services create serious challenges to the Government of Nepal” The meaning of this sentence is unclear.

p.5 “Women who felt friends and family to be supportive were twice as likely to attend ANC as other women” What country/setting does this research refer to?

p.5 reconsider the definition of the term “patriarchal” or perhaps use a different term?

p.5 “mothers-in-law usually hold the top position in a hierarchical family network”
this statement is contradictory given the preceding statement about patriarchy, and needs to be clarified or the nuances of these meanings drawn out for a Nepalese setting

p.5 “qualitative interviews are less formally structured [THAN WHAT?]…."

p.6 “an understudied population” – it is unclear what this understudied population refers to – pregnant women? Mothers-in-law?

p.12 “Elevated? family” query “?”

p.12 Quote from ANC user’s MIL 4 - This quote is contradictory – it would have been useful to see some exploration of these contradictions

p.16 “…took the, back to health….”

p.16 check grammar/sense of this para “One mother-in-law who had….living in a separate household”

Checking for grammar and punctuation needs to be done thoroughly throughout.

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.