Reviewer's report

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

Version: 3 Date: 20 April 2010

Reviewer: ernestina coast

Reviewer's report:

Major compulsory revisions

I am still unclear why the title includes the term “illiterate”. As the authors explain in their reply to the reviewers, and make clear in the article, the cohort effect of education means that all of the MILs (n=10) in the study were illiterate. As far as I can tell, illiteracy per se is not the focus of the study (e.g.: the authors are not testing whether illiteracy or literacy has an impact or how it has an impact on ANC uptake), in which case why is the title not “Mother-in-law’s role in antenatal care decision-making n Nepal: A qualitative study”?

p.3

Query statement that educational class of MILs significantly affected ANC use by DIL – in their response to reviewers the authors stated that all MILs had the same level of education i.e.: none (also in Table 1)

This issue is returned to on p.18 with

“a few, usually more educated mothers-in-law” – according to Table 1 and the article title there are no MILs with education. Are the authors conflating the terms education and literacy? This lack of clarity needs to be addressed, especially when it is returned to in the conclusion in the quote above.

And again on p.19

“as most mothers-in-law are uneducated” – according to Table 1 all of the MILs are uneducated

Minor essential revisions

p.2 abstract

what are the 2 diverse communities?

p.3

health promotion should target both women and family members, especially MILs – but what about husbands? It really is unclear the role of the husbands in this study. As mediators of the MIL influence? As contradictory influencers of the uptake of ANC?

p.5
unclear meaning of “women’s better position”

p.7
The questions were largely demographic and derived from the DHS (Demographic and Health Surveys) data.
Suggest either remove word “data” or replace with “questionnaire”

p.8
Given the small sample sizes, and absence of any tests of statistical significance (entirely appropriate for the methodology), suggest not using language such as “Non-users were more likely to be older, from lower class/caste and to have three or more children already” and use more descriptive language.

p.18
the issue of family size creating more household work meaning that women from larger households were less likely to use ANC – it might be useful to acknowledge that, by definition, higher parity women are more likely to live in larger family groups (so that there is an inter-relationship between the two?)

Some typos still remain:

p.3
had an affect should read had an effect

p.7
content.,

p.18
had more family members at home generally

Discretionary revisions

p.4
The authors might want to consider updating or acknowledging with very recent data from Lancet article re: total estimated number of maternal deaths per annum

p.6
The use of a reference from Jamaica sits rather oddly in a paragraph that presents evidence from Nepal and “similar contexts”

p.6
“In Nepalese society it is customary for senior women to occupy the top position in a hierarchical family network”. Might be worth stating whether Nepalese society is matriarchal?
the authors hint at a really interesting avenue of discussion – that in nuclear households in Nepal (assumption that this means that MILs are not co-resident in a nuclear household?) then husbands have the dominant decision-making power. The living arrangements of the respondents into broad categories i.e.: MIL co- or non-resident could be a useful socio-demographic indicator in this respect?

authors state that multiple perspectives - including that of husbands – is strength of the study. Yes it is, but it would have been useful if greater use had been made of the husbands’ perspectives? Data from husbands are given very limited exposure in the results section.

Query the construction of paragraphs – authors might want to reflect on what constitutes a paragraph eg: p. 4 – two very short paragraphs beginning “In Nepal...” and “Complications....”.

See also “Several women mentioned mothers-in-law’s belief that hard work is acceptable as pregnancy is not an illness.” – this is presented as a paragraph (without any supporting evidence)

These are just limited examples and would suggest going through the paper to check for paragraph flow.

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'