Reviewer's report

**Title:** Contradictions and conflict: A meta-ethnographic study of migrant women's experiences of breastfeeding in a new country

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**Reviewer:** Alison McFadden

**Reviewer's report:**

The paper presents a meta-synthesis of migrant’s women’s experiences of breastfeeding in a host country and suggests that women experience dissonance between their individual beliefs and practices and the practices in the host country.

Overall the paper has potential to provide important information but needs a sound theoretical underpinning. This would help the authors to further critique the studies they synthesise and to avoid potentially essentialist interpretations. The research question requires further clarification as described below. The paper is written to an acceptable standard.

There were no page numbers in the manuscript so I manually numbered the pages starting with the title page.

**Minor Essential Revisions**

1. At the top of page 12 participants are described as ‘migrating from a range of countries’. Central and South America are not countries – they could perhaps be described as regions. See below for more general point about terminology.

2. There was no table 1 provided with the manuscript – should table 2 have been labelled table 1?

3. The left hand column of table 3 needs editing for consistency i.e. include all years of publication, countries and consistency of use of et al – also it is not clear why it is headed UK. This table is not referred to in the text – is it needed?

4. It is not clear what the last sentence of the middle paragraph of page 26 (regarding excluded studies) means – suggest removing it.

5. There is a tendency to use first authors’ names only in the text omitting ‘et al’ or a second authors’ name. This needs correcting throughout.

7. The second part of the first sentence of the introduction is a generalisation for which I could not find any evidence in the reference provided – suggest authors provide a page number.

8. The third sentence of the introduction ends ‘particularly in more affluent countries’ but only evidence from UK and US is cited. Further references need to be added of a range of affluent countries or the wording changed.

9. The third paragraph of the introduction needs references to support the statements.

Major Compulsory Revisions

10. The authors need to define how they are using the term ‘migrant’. Does it mean women born in one country who migrate to another or does it include women from minority ethnic backgrounds/heritage who were born in the host country? Similarly is ‘non-migrant’ women used to denote women from minority ethnic background/heritage who were born in the host country or does it mean the majority population of the host country? On page 20 it is unclear what the phrase ‘living as migrants’ means.

11. The last sentence of the abstract refers to the material circumstances of women – this is no doubt true but there is no evidence of this in the paper as currently presented.

12. It is unclear from the methods what the inclusion criteria were in terms of countries of origin and host countries. The use of ‘non English speaking background’ as a search term and the limitation to English language publications suggests ‘Western host country’ was limited to English speaking host countries although this is not stated. In the abstract the term ‘more affluent’ is used -was the synthesis limited to women from low and middle income countries migrating to high income countries?

13. The sentence at the end of page 7 suggests that ‘women do not access health services or support for breastfeeding’ suggesting the problem is with women. There is evidence that health services do not provide accessible or appropriate services. See for example:


14. Some of the issues with terminology highlighted above reflect the broader theoretical/conceptual problem of how individuals’ identities (including migration histories) are described and operationalised in research. There are no easy
answers but the authors need to critique how the included studies theorised and operationalised the ethnicity of study participants and the significance of this for the synthesis and interpretation of the findings. Problematic terms include Asian/South Asian in UK studies (and which have different meanings in Australia and US) and Latino/Hispanic in US studies. All these terms are ambiguous in their meaning. For discussions of these issues see for example:


15. A related issue to the use of terminology, is the representation of women migrating from one country to another as homogenous groups with static ‘cultural’ or so called ‘traditional’ practices. For example on page 18 reference is made to religious beliefs of South Asian grandmothers with the Koran as an example – the Koran would only be relevant to Muslim grandmothers and even they are likely to have diverse understandings of how it applies to them as individuals. In the last paragraph on page 20 it is suggested that women from Vietnam, Thailand and China all follow a particular set of postpartum practices. On page 28 in the discussion the authors cite Choudhry et al using the phrase ‘South Asian cultural teachings’ as though this was a homogenous concept. Women are likely to vary in to what extent they maintain practices from their countries of origin as will those practices vary over place and time within the countries of origin. Equally there is no one static dominant culture in host countries. There is a risk of essentialism if this is not acknowledged, critiqued and discussed. The authors need to critique the studies for these issues and take care not to represent findings in an essentialist manner. These concerns are touched on in the discussion of the limitations of the synthesis but they need to be elaborated throughout the paper. Acknowledging similarities between migrant and host population is an important aspect of this. The point is well made in relation to understandings of insufficient milk at the end of page 27 but would equally apply to breastfeeding in public, the role of grandmothers in women’s breastfeeding decisions and women’s struggles to breastfeed while managing life with new baby regardless of ethnicity or migration history. There is ample literature available to support a discussion of this.

16. The final sentence of the conclusion needs a proviso related to the diversity of beliefs and experiences within cultural groups and similarities with majority populations in host countries otherwise it is an essentialist statement.
Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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.