Reviewer's report

Title: A qualitative study on the breastfeeding experiences of first-time mothers in Vientiane, Lao PDR

Version: 2 Date: 26 August 2013

Reviewer: Jane Scott

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The paper is generally well written except for a number of relatively minor ambiguities, inconsistencies and repetition.

Major Compulsory revisions

1. Page 5 Para 4 last sentence. The authors state that 6 FGD with 36 participants were conducted but in the preceding sentence say that participants were identified for one focus group discussion. While in the methods section in the abstract states two focus groups with six participants in each district were conducted, which would be 4 focus groups with a total of 24 participants. Either the abstract or the methods section in the body of the paper needs to be corrected.

Results

2. Page 7 line 2. According to the results section only one woman in the IDI group had lower secondary level education but in Table 1 there are 5 participants listed as having lower secondary level education.

3. Page 9 1st line. It is unclear if the fathers referred to are the child’s father or the mother’s father as this paragraph is referring to a woman’s elders.

Reasons for exclusive breastfeeding

4. Page 9 While the women may have said that they were “unable” to EBF to six months I would like the authors to avoid using the phrase “being able to EBF” and instead refer to women exclusively breastfeeding to six months. The reasons given for not EBF to six months do not necessarily suggest a physiological “inability to EBF” but social and cultural barriers to EBF.

5. Page 9 2nd last line. Reference to “being able to BF” is made here as well.

Page 12 Influences of health staff

6. The authors refer to “focus group midwives”. According to the methods section (p6 line 4) key informants were interviewed individually.

P12 Discussion

7. The authors should take care when comparing the quantitative data collected on a limited number of focus group and/or in-depth interview participants with
national data. For instance, the authors claim that the early initiation of BF was much higher than the national average of 30% and I think are implying that this demonstrates an improvement in this practice. It is inappropriate to compare data of this kind collected from a non-representative sample that has been purposefully recruited with data collected in observational studies.

8. Furthermore, it is unclear if the rates referred to are for the 16 participants that were individually interviewed or for the these women plus the 36 who participated in the FGDs.

9. P12 Para 3 1st sentence. This sentence refers to women being able to EBF and should be rewritten as follows

“Despite the overall positive perception of BF less than half of all mothers EBF for the full six months or continued to BF for two years.”

10. P12 Para 3 line 5 refers to inability to EBF and would be better reworded as “one of the main reasons for the early cessation of EBF…”

11. P12 Para 3. Again in this paragraph there is the inappropriate comparison of rates of practices of women in this study, which was not the purpose of the focus groups.

Minor essential revisions

12. Page 5 Study setting. Data is the plural of datum and therefore should say “data were” or “data are” throughout. The sentence starting on line six should read “However such data were not available and the only data we could obtain were at the provincial level.

The paper should be checked carefully for other instances where this has occurred that I have not detected.

13. Page 7 3rd last line. The abbreviation ANC needs to be defined as Antenatal Classes (ANC) the first time it is used.

14. Page 10 line 2 Suggest replacing “As one person explained” with “As one elder explained”

15. P11 1st line should read “could lead to termination of BF.”

Page 12 Discussion

16. Ist sentence should read “first-time mothers” not “first mothers”

References

17. Reference 20 and 25 appear to be the same as are references 23 and 26. This occurs when you have duplicate references in an Endnote library

Discretionary revisions

Abstract
18. It is unclear from the abstract methodology who the participants were. I recommend replacing “six participants” with “six first-time mothers”.

Background
19. Page 4 Para 1 line 3. All three practices are important as a set of practices. Suggest removing “and/or continued BF” and replace with “and continued BF until the child is at least 24 months”.

20. Page 4 Para 1 line 6. It is not only antibodies in breast milk that contribute to immune protection and recommend writing “as well as antibodies and a variety of bioactive components to provide….”

21. Page 4 Para 2. Sentences 1 and 3 could be combined as both refer to low prevalence of EBF.

22. Page 4 Para 2. The National campaign launched in mid-2009 is referred to twice in this paragraph. The second last sentence of this paragraph is unnecessary as the information is included in the last sentence.

Study setting
23. Page 5 Sisattanak is described as an urban environment but no equivalent description e.g. rural or urban, is provided for Hatxayfong.

Sample
24. Page 5 Para 4 The second inclusion criteria is redundant as in order to be a first-time “mother” the participant is by default female.

25. Page 6 line 5. The 3rd sentence is grammatically incomplete. What were the key informants providing insight into?

P10 Insufficient milk
26. It is unclear if the health staff referred to in the first sentence are the health staff interviewed or were health staff identified by the women interviewed as having suggested that they do this. I suspect it is the former and recommend writing “health staff interviewed suggested …” to remove any ambiguity.

27. P12 Para 3 line 9. Should read “14 of the 16 mothers individually interviewed” as you do not give the characteristics for the 36 FGD participants.

28. P13 Para 2 line 8. Reference is made to the previous Lao PDR recommendations to EBF for 4 months. It would be useful to know in what year the recommendations were revised in line with the WHO recommendation to EBF to 6 months.

P13 Limitations
29. I think another probable limitation is that FGD participants were relatively well educated. While you do not give the education characteristics of the FGD participants, all of the in-depth interview participants had completed lower
secondary school or higher. According to the WHO health indicator database, adult literacy for Lao is ~72%, which suggests that study participants were better educated than the general population.

**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 I have no competing interests