Reviewer's report

Title: Realities of, attitudes towards and barriers to male involvement in newborn care in rural Ghana, West Africa: a qualitative analysis

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Reviewer: Karin Gross

Reviewer's report:

This article contains interesting and important findings on male involvement in the field of maternal and child health in Africa, where research is still scarce. I liked reading the paper, however, I miss a clear structure and the results lack depth. I believe, however, that by some revisions, the paper can be strengthened and become an interesting publication.

Please find below my main points of critique in order to support the revision of the paper:

Major compulsory revisions:

Title:
1. I believe that the title as well as the research question should be changed, since the paper is not about “realities” of male involvement. The methods used (which are interviews and not observation) do not allow to capture realities, but rather attitudes and perceptions, since interviews generate reported data. Please change this throughout the paper.

Background:
1. The literature search on male involvement literature in the African context sounds very promising, but unfortunately the reader is disappointed since the information given on the studies is very scarce. The reader is informed about where male involvement could be an effective strategy and how it was measured, but there is no information about whether it was effective and what problems or benefits were associated with male involvement interventions. I would wish to get more extensive information on what has been learnt so far from interventions on male involvement in the African context.

2. It does also not really become clear what your literature research encompasses. On the one hand, it seems to be a general search on male involvement; on the other hand, it seems to be limited on intervention studies and studies related to interventions. Could you please be more precise?

3. Giving an overview on the findings in the literature would also help the authors to strengthen the research question and to make it more precise. At the moment the research question (“addressing the realities of and potential for male involvement in newborn care in Africa using qualitative data collected from recent mothers and fathers in central rural Ghana”) is very vague and does not reflect
what is reported in the result section.

Methods:

1. 2nd paragraph: The methods are not very clearly described. It does not become clear, what the difference is between the birth and newborn care narratives of the mothers, and the in-depth interviews with the fathers. I guess both were in-depth interviews. Please describe in more detail the content of all three interviews.

2. You write “specific newborn care behaviors that were explored…” Since you used no observation but interviews, you cannot report on behaviors, but only on reported behaviors. Moreover, it does not become clear in relation to whom these “behaviors” were explored… in the interviews with the mothers or with the fathers?

3. I am also surprised that “selecting delivery location, birth preparedness and complication readiness” is subsumed under newborn care.

4. 3rd paragraph: “Data collection continued until saturation was reached”. Here is also not clear to which method this refers. Probably not to FGDs since you only had 2 of them… please be precise.

5. 4th paragraph: “… coded and sorted emergent themes and overall associations and frameworks were established”. I do not understand what the authors mean when they say that they established overall associations and frameworks, but I could not find any framework in the paper. In the context of qualitative research, frameworks relate to theories, which is not the case in this paper.

Results:

The whole result section needs revision.

1. It rather reads like a report of the coded themes, than like a qualitative paper. I would expect the authors to bring the results to a higher abstraction level, rather than report the emergent themes on after the other. Only in the last part of the results, the authors link their findings to concepts such as gender roles/relations. I would wish to have more of that.

2. Moreover, the citations should be used to underline the argument that the authors would like to bring through. I particularly lack citations of women. How do they feel about male involvement in their domain of newborn care? Since your argument is that barriers to male involvement need to be addressed, women’s attitudes towards male involvement in newborn care should certainly be part of this paper. You mention in the discussion that women can be complicit in maintaining gender divisions, but there is not enough information on it in the results.

3. I also lack a critical reflection on the collected data. Data from the FGDs cannot be presented as truths, since statements in FGDs, as generally in interviews, are linked to presentation/representation.

4. Line 145: The authors write that men were actively involved in unexpected or
quickly progressing birth. Please give more information on what they did in this situation, and give the reader an impression, how often this was the case, since you continue saying, that women reported to have delivered on their own.

Discussion:
1. To my opinion, the discussion is the best part of the paper. Maybe the statements you make in the discussion can be taken as a help to structure your result section: I would see themes like f.e. no physical newborn care, men as economic providers and decision makers, newborn care and gender roles...

Minor essential revisions:
Background:
1. Second paragraph: use “” for the search terms

Methods:
1. 3rd paragraph: what is meant by “word of mouth”?
2. 3rd paragraph: transcribed into English.

Results:
1. Line 129: Areas closed to men. Closed is not the right wording, maybe “restricted”, “inaccessible”?
2. Line 244, information on informant is lacking.

Discussion:
1. “We found that many men embrace the importance of newborn care and that some already go against deeply entrenched cultural norms to carry out health practices”. Where did you describe the second part in the Results?

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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.