Reviewer's report

Title: The early postnatal period: exploring women's views, expectations and experiences of care using focus groups in Victoria, Australia

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Reviewer: Ingegerd Hildingsson

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This is an interesting paper describing mothers' and some fathers' views about postnatal care. Data were collected using focus group discussions with 52 participants, analyzed with thematic network to construct and describe connect categories with emerging themes on different levels.

The background section is relevant and the aim of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' expectations and experiences of postnatal care.

It is also stated that this study is exploratory in nature and that there will a randomised controlled trial in the future. The role of the father in postnatal care is not clearly described-do fathers have the opportunity to stay over night on the postnatal ward? This could be clarified.

Methods

There is a mix of people attending the FGDs, that's very good to have different views.

I do miss some information in the description of the analysis. The method paper referred to is very interesting and very helpful in understanding the way the thematic networks are built. However, the reader could get a broader understanding of the whole process, i.e. Step 1. Coding the text using a coding framework and/or from the issues raised in the text, Step 2, identifying themes with abstraction and refinement and 3. Constructing the network. The findings could be more understandable if these previous steps are described.

Another statement that caught my eyes was that the observer registered body language- was it of any use? If so, how?

Results

My personal view is that a text like this will be better without question marks in the headings.

In the description of who participated it says that a number of strategies were used to recruit fathers- what were the strategies? I'm curious.

The themes described seems relevant and the issues raised mirrors the international literature on postnatal care and the factors contributing to a negative experience of it. It's very interesting that women want to have this type of care,
when they think they have access to staff, which is not the real truth. Being forced out is theme recognized in studies both with qualitative and quantitative approaches and of course professional support.

The quotations are relevant and mirrors the description of themes, but maybe too many. Could do with a reduction, just showing the most important ones.

Discussion

Relevant things are brought up. The issues discussed have great clinical implications and it must be time to take a world-wide discussion about what we shall do with the postnatal are? Multi-center studies in various countries could be one way to go. In the conclusion section the authors elucidate an important issue, the social construction of childbirth. How can we staff in antenatal and postnatal care empower women to trust their ability to take care of their babies and trust themselves as parents?

What next?: Accept after discretionary revisions

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.