Reviewer's report

Title: Why are breastfeeding rates low in Lebanon? A qualitative study

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Reviewer: Virginia Schmied

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This is an interesting paper and appears to present some new findings within a particular cultural context. It would make a welcome addition to the literature but requires some rewriting to ensure that readers can make best use of the findings. The introduction to the paper is overall, well written and positions the study in the international literature.

Major compulsory revisions

Introduction
What is missing here is any specific discussion of breastfeeding in Lebanon – what is known about this and others who have researched breastfeeding in Arabic countries.

In the introduction clarification is needed on a point made in the second paragraph. The authors mention the PROBIT trial in Belarus. It is described as the only RCT on breastfeeding effects. This is not clear and is not a well evidenced statement. This was an RCT on a particular intervention (the steps of the BFHI). While this was a very large trial, it is certainly not the only RCT of interventions on breastfeeding. Please clarify what was meant by this statement.

The introduction finishes off with a statement that this is a ‘qualitative, ethnographic study’ ... ‘using a prospective design with longitudinal follow up’. While qualitative research can be longitudinal and prospective, it is in a sense mixing two approaches – quantitative and a qualitative approach – I believe this would be better described as a qualitative longitudinal study that used a series of interviews with women.... I am also not sure the design of this study is really ethnographic. While observation is not essential for ethnography, it is often an important component of understanding cultural practices and used to understand practices often from multiple perspectives. The design of this study is more a qualitative description of breastfeeding practices.

Methods
The methods section needs to be set out in a more systematic way to ensure that the reader is clear about who participated and what they were involved in doing and then how the data were analysed. Need to be clear about the purpose of the focus groups prior to the interviews.

I suggest start with a statement about design – clarifying the approach as
described above. Then describe the settings were the participants were recruited from

Then describe the study participants – the demographic details of participants have not been provided either in the methods section or in the findings – this needs to be provided and could be in a table – details such as age, parity, socio-economic status etc

The journal may have a preference as to whether the participant details as positioned in the methods section or at the beginning of findings.

Data collection
Following discussion of participants and recruitment, then discuss under a subheading – data collection and here you may want to separate data collection approach for the focus groups and the interviews stating why the focus groups were conducted and why the interviews then followed. At present it is not really clear why both were conducted. In discussion of focus groups need to bring together the points made about how many participants, permission to record, what type of environment the discussion was conducted in and the focus groups prompts as mentioned. More detail is required on the interviews. The interviews can then be described following the focus groups indicating whether they were all face to face or on the phone and the number of interview conducted noting the average number and the range which could be in a table. Need to outline the questions asked of women in these indepth interviews but were the follow up interviews also indepth or were they brief ?? phone interviews to establish if they were still breastfeeding and why or why not.

The analysis of data needs to be described together – how were focus group and interview qualitative analysed. Presumably thematic analysis was used for both, so can be described together. These data are presented separately in the results – what is the purpose of this – did the thematic analysis from the focus groups inform the interview questions? Need to provide some references to the approach to thematic analysis.

It is probably also important here to mention that descriptive statistics (content analysis) – frequencies have been used to analyse and report the proportion of women breastfeeding at each interview time point.

Findings
First the authors present the findings of how many women were breastfeeding at certain time point sin the follow up interviews. This could be more clearly presented in a table.

My main concern in relation to the findings is that the findings are not presented in a thematic way. The qualitative data from the focus groups and from the interviews appears to have been analysed separately and presented using descriptive headings that imply qualitative content analysis rather than a thematic analysis. There also seems to be little point in presenting the focus group data first and then presenting the interview data as the findings are the same mostly
and therefore repetitive.

I would suggest that you report women’s experiences noting that overall women in the focus groups and in the interviews reporting both positive perceptions and experiences of breastfeeding as well as what could be described as negative or more difficult experiences. What also seemed to be more positive at the same time also promoted breastfeeding so it is hard to separate into the barriers and promoters and this is why there is some repetition.

The themes presented could include ‘a joyful and connected experience’; ‘being a mother’ ‘its best for the baby’; ‘not enough milk’; or ‘my sister said I would not have enough milk’ ‘it makes your breasts sag’ ‘no one tells you about the pain’ ‘breastfeeding is tiring’ etc. The findings could be reported under personal experiences and then perceptions of family and society but I believe that pulling out themes in this way would reduce the repetition and also demonstrate a more thematic approach.

The other alternative is to keep the more descriptive non thematic headings and describe this as a qualitative descriptive study that used content analysis to analyse the data.

Discussion

The paper does not have a section that discusses the findings in relation to the literature.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**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' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.