Reviewer's report

Title: Paniya Voices: Rationale, design, and implementation of a Participatory Poverty and Health Assessment among a marginalised South Indian tribal population

Version: 2 Date: 6 August 2009

Reviewer: M Chambers

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting paper, which I enjoyed reading. However, if the paper is to meet its purpose that is ‘to provide researchers with a potential approach to working with marginalised communities in low-income settings’ there needs to be greater detail of what exactly happened in order to facilitate replication. Secondly, as stated in the data recording, management and analysis section there is still work ongoing so at a later stage it would be good to hear of the outcomes and impact on policy; there appears a lot yet to be achieved. Thirdly, from reading other articles published by BioMed it would appear that most had a greater scientific rational and background than this paper so something for consideration by the authors. Finally I took the liberty of using track changes and made some corrections and suggestions on the text. This was done in order to help the authors address the key issues/queries raised as part of the review. I trust that this is acceptable.

Most if not all of the comments and queries made need to be addressed therefore fit into the category of Major Compulsory Revisions. These are marked on the text which is attached. There are also some Minor Essential Revisions regarding the labelling of figures and some typing errors which are also marked on the text.

The major compulsory revisions relate to the need for clarification of specific terms or insufficient explanation, for example, no description of the pilot study, the nature of informal engagement, the involvement of colonies in the preparation of materials for ethical approval and so forth. Reference is made to a vulnerability framework but no description of what this is. Similarly the research protocol is referred to again no idea what that consisted of. Having some indication of the shape and nature of the above would be important if the authors are sticking to the overall purpose of the paper. All of these important issues are identified on the text.

A more detailed background would also help the reader get this project into context and where it resides within the overall larger study. The authors need to place themselves in the shoes of someone reading this that knows nothing about the project or their methodology (which is a very good one). It might also be useful to include something about the issues/challenges that the research team had to overcome and how other researchers might be able to avoid or avert these.
At present unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions.

When the study is described in more detail I believe the content will be of interest to a wide community of researchers. Increasingly, the importance of participant/community engagement and the need to reach vulnerable groups is being recognised by policy makers and others, therefore a methodology which can help realise this should be shared.

The quality of written English is acceptable.

I have no competing interests in relation to this paper nor have I received any reimbursements or fees from an organisation that may gain or lose financially from the publication of this paper, either now or in the future.