Reviewer's report

Title: Why is exclusive breastfeeding easy to preach but difficult to practice in Kwale, Kenya? : Perception on health and nutritional problems and feeding practices of children

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Reviewer: Laura C Altobelli

Reviewer's report:

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
   This is an exploratory study of indigenous perceptions and beliefs of infant illness and care seeking behaviors, which affect infant feeding practices. This approach to the question of infant feeding behaviors appears to be biased to a presumed cause and effect of the former (illness and health seeking) being causal to the latter (exclusivity of breastfeeding).

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
   One short paragraph is used to describe the methodology. “Standard qualitative research methodology” was reportedly, but the methods are not referenced and we don’t really know what methods were used. The interviewers are not identified. It is not reported why the researchers decided to interview 32 mothers, nor how those mothers were selected. No description of basic socio-demographic characteristics of interviewees is included.

3. Are the data sound?
   There are not data reported on the focus of the study reported, as the study is purely qualitative. The only data presented is on a supplementary table on the association between prevalence of anemia and parasitic disease, which is not relevant to the issue being reported on.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
   No opinion, as relevant data is not reported, only qualitative assessments.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
   No, because the researchers report that “insufficient milk syndrome” is the major factor identified by mothers as the reason for stopping exclusive breastfeeding, but they conclude that other reasons are more important causes (child illness) and do not investigate the reasons for the insufficient milk syndrome, which is fully discussed in other literature that is not cited in this paper.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
   No limitations are stated.
7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
Other work is cited.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
I felt that the study title, as well as the conclusions, suggest that it is important for health providers to consider social and cultural factors when designing educational messages to convince mothers to breastfeed. However, the study methodology was more focused on maternal beliefs and practices, and less so on beliefs and practices of health providers who need to orient their messages to maternal beliefs. In other research, it is found that health providers frequently hold the same beliefs as mothers, since they haven’t been taught otherwise, therefore they are unable to develop convincing arguments to change maternal behavior toward exclusive breastfeeding. In short, there seems to be a disconnect between the title, the research methods and findings, and the conclusions. Also the issue of insufficient milk syndrome is referred to but is not taken seriously as a causal factor in this research.

9. Is the writing acceptable?
Yes

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**Quality of written English:** Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

**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.