Reviewer's report

Title: The involvement of men in maternal health care: participatory case studies from Maligita and Kibibi, Uganda

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Reviewer: Pius Okong

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Reproductive Health currently considers the following article types: Case report, Commentary, Research, Review and Study protocol articles.

When assessing the work, please consider the following points:

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?

In the first four paragraphs in the background, the authors review the subject of male involvement and findings from previous studies regarding this subject. They stop at the review then state the purpose of the study in paragraph five.

Major Compulsory Revisions is needed for the following: There is no research question posed and no problem statement mentioned regarding male involvement in Jinja or these two villages: Maliga and Kibibi.

Minor Essential Revisions is needed for the following: The authors also seem to use “maternal Health” interchangeably with “maternal health care” and “reproductive Health” and these are different.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?

Major Compulsory Revisions are necessary for all the issues raised below regarding methods:

The authors suggest that this is an exploratory study of male involvement without justification for an exploratory study. It is difficult to accept an exploratory study because six of the 12 studies referred to in the whole paper were carried out in Uganda and so there is sufficient ground for a Quantitative or Qualitative study or combined. The methods are not well described in sufficient details provided to replicate the work and this is illustrated by lack of the following information about the methods: No ethical approval was obtained from local Ethical Committee or the National Council for Science and Technology and the authors do not describe how consent was obtained and if it was obtained at all.

Thirty five (35) respondents were given questionnaires but it is not clear in what language and if they were self administered or administered by a research Assistant?

The number of Focus group discussions is not mentioned. There is an anomaly
with the number of participants in each FGD in Kibibi which is double that of participants in Maligita. Why was it done like that? What was the justification for this variance? The number of FGDs with only women or men or mixed is not stated.

It is not stated if data collectors were trained. One of the data collectors is mentioned by name “Christine”. This is not acceptable. Secondly, “Christine” is a community nurse. Who is a community nurse in Uganda? (there seems to be no such a person in Uganda).

It is not mentioned how the FGds were moderated except that participants were given refreshments (the latter is not acceptable in research...not part of methodology).

It not clear if the 35 respondents to the questionnaires were also the participants in FGDs? If that is the case, this is not acceptable practice in research.

The authors do not describe justification for carrying out the study in two small villages. How were these two villages selected for the study? The study lacks external validity.

3. Are the data sound and well controlled?

Major Compulsory Revisions necessary for the following:

Data from questionnaires has been analysed quantitatively and presented in tables 2 and 3 as summary of characteristics of respondents. It is not clear if this was meant to be a quantitative study or not; BECAUSE the authors go on to draw inference from these small numbers, referring to “all men” or the “majority” of men or women etc. These summaries cannot be used for drawing inferences, conclusions and recommendations. For example, all the 6 men from Kibibi are muslims. What does it mean?

Minor Essential Revisions are necessary for the following:

Authors mention that translation was involved in data collection, and preparation for analysis but it is not clear how this was handled and if it involved questionnaires or FGDs or both? FGDs: The focus of analysis for each was the group, which is the correct way but falls short of highlighting concordance within the group or in some cases, divergence.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

Largely not. Therefore Major Compulsory Revisions necessary for the following and others:

This was not a quantitative study and no sample size estimation was made. And yet the summaries from questionnaires are presented in tables 2&3 with emphasis on proportions as if for quantitative analysis. The authors go on to draw inferences from these summaries.

The FGDs findings are often well stated but the “quotes” (in italics) to illustrate points are labelled wrongly such as “women’s focus group from Kibibi” or “men’s
focus group from Maligita” etc. This is not correct. The quote is from one person from a particular group e.g “a woman from women’s focus group in Kibibi” or “a man from a focus group in Maligita”. People should not be mentioned by name, “Christine” is mentioned again in person!

It is very strange for example that Kibibi women’s FGD was able to give precise figures: “…60% of the men take you to hospital and stand aside and wait. Those take care of you if there is a problem, they talk to the health workers, they really take care of you in the hospital. The other 40% will stay in the village. When the labor pain starts they are scared to be near you. When they see you in pain, they feel bad, they feel sad and they don’t want to be near you.” (Kibibi women’s focus group).

Focus group discussions usually do not generate this type of information, so it is difficult to understand how the authors came up with this.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

The discussions are generally well presented. However Major Compulsory Revisions are necessary in following areas:

Several parts were not drawn from the data e.g. “There were no conversations on partner roles and expectations between husband and wife in the villages, which might serve to explain why the women often felt unsupported. While a greater number of the participants did feel that men and women decided together where to give birth, there was little evidence from our research to show that these types of conversations extended to other parts of pregnancy and delivery”. It is not possible to elicit these types of conversations between men and women from FGDs. Rather the best method would have been In Depth interviews where each individual would be able to explore this at a personal level.

The authors do not discuss limitations of this study, specifically sample size and lack of external validity. So what is the use of these findings for these two villages?

Conclusion

This is not stated well and Major Compulsory Revisions are necessary in following areas. The first paragraph states findings from the study. Then three recommendations are given (not conclusion?) and one of them is from a referenced study?! “Women and men need to be partners. These types of partnerships would allow men and women to freely consult and make choices together that achieve similar reproductive goals. For a partnership to work trust, respect and ownership of decisions and outcomes as well as equality all have to be developed between the pair (Kinane and Ezekiel-Hart, 2009)”

6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?

Minor Essential Revisions necessary:

The Title suggests there were two or perhaps more participatory case studies in Maligita and Kibibi. In reality, it was one study. It is not spelled out what was
“participatory” in or about the study?

7. Is the writing acceptable?

In general the layout is acceptable but there is need for Minor Essential Revisions to address the following:

• The role of tables in presentation of the characteristics of participants. Are tables necessary? It is not clear if these characteristics are for respondents to questionnaires only or questionnaires and FGDs?

• Inference should not be drawn from characteristics of participants.

• The discussion should highlight limitations of the study which directly impact on external validity of these findings.

• The conclusion should be separated from recommendations and really applicable to these two small communities. There are many other studies on male involvement on reproductive health and also maternal health in Uganda to add to the six.

**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.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I have not received any reimbursements, fees, funding or salary from an organization that may in any way gain or loose financially from publication of this manuscript now or in the future.

I do not hold any stocks or shares as stated in point number 2

I do not hold and I am not applying for any patents as stated in point number 3

I do not have any other competing financial interests

I do not have any other non-financial competing interests in relation to this paper.

I declare that I have no competing interests.