Reviewer's report

Title: Facilitators and barriers to facility-based delivery in low- and middle-income countries: A qualitative evidence synthesis

Version: 1 Date: 1 May 2014

Reviewer: Karin Hannes

Reviewer's report:

Review report Bohren et al.

Overall comment:
This is a well written report that follows the current state of the art in the methodology of systematic reviews. However, the information on the methodology used is rather scarce. The procedure could better be explained so that starting reviewers can draw from this part for their own projects.

- Major Compulsory Revisions
  • Methods section: Quality Assessment: a quality assessment has been done, but it is not fully clear whether studies were excluded based on lower quality or what has been done with potentially flawed paper findings in the findings section. This should be explained or shown through, for example, a sensitivity analysis.
  • The outline of the synthesis method is fairly limited and does not provide much detail on what has been going on in practice. This section should be expanded on. It does not help other authors to repeat the study. It is like the themes and subcategories suddenly 'emerge' from the data; make this move from text units to categories and themes more explicit. I can imagine that the use of 1st, 2nd and 3th order concepts, for example, may help.
  • Certainty of findings: explain how this differs from the CASP, which is also a critical appraisal exercise including aspects of evaluating how certain data are or how much trust we can put into them.
  • The prisma statement has been developed for quantitative reviews. Did you add any specific criteria to it that better matches what should be reported in QES. The ENTREQ statement has been developed to this end. You may want to match your report with these criteria.
  • Explain how box 1 has been developed. Was it an a-priori scheme based on theory or a scheme that has been generated bottom-up? What is the relation between box 1 and table 1? How has it been used in the analysis? This is unclear.

Minor Essential Revisions
• Background section:
Potential correction: I don’t think that the use of systematic methods reduces bias
persé. I think it increases transparency, which allows the reader to better judge the credibility and trustworthiness of Qualitative Evidence Syntheses (QES).

• Methods section:
  Data-extraction: How many authors responded on the request for information? What form or which descriptive data were used for the extraction of data?

• Findings: Change review into findings. You methods part is also part of the review. Number the studies in appendix E or mark the included studies in the reference list with an *.

• Provide study numbers for the statement about elder woman pressuring younger women to deliver at home. In the effects to policy section, link study numbers to subdivisions in the phrase.

• Explain the labels in table 2: what is certainty in the evidence? The 1st and the 3th account in the table have a different certainty label, however have the same explanation assigned to it. The 11th and 12th account, for example have the same certainty label, however a different explanation of it. This is confusing.

- Discretionary Revisions

It is unclear whether the appendixes will be published with the review, but it seems necessary. You may want to consider a link to an online available annex in the article.

**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 declare that I have no competing interests.