Author's response to reviews

Title: Middle Eastern mothers in Sweden, their experiences of the maternal health service and their partners involvement

Authors:

Pernilla Ny (pernilla.ny@med.lu.se)
Elisabeth D Karlsson (elisabeth.dejin-karlsson@hs.mah.se)
Lars Plantin (lars.plantin@hs.mah.se)
Anna-karin Dykes (anna-karin.dykes@med.lu.se)

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To the Editor 2007-05-01

General comments (from Ann M Thomson):

Second part:
The reasons for using interviews in the participants mother tongue as well as in Swedish (the language of the researcher), the official language used in the country of domicile, were several. Having the possibility to offer the participants the opportunity to express themselves in their mother tongue made it possible for those who otherwise are often excluded in research, due to lack of interpreters and funding. Being able to combine focus group interviews with individual interviews conducted in Swedish made it possible for the researcher to communicate with the participants in her own language. Even women who had lived in Sweden for a longer period of time could not express themselves freely in Swedish, as noted in p.8 section 2. Therefore it was also necessary to be able to offer the interviews in both Arabic and Swedish, otherwise we would have had to exclude an important number of women due to their indifferent level of knowledge in Swedish (see page 8 last section). In the discussion section, page 22, first section, we have used the reference 22 (Twinn 1998) to support the notion that it is important to conduct interviews in the participant's first language.

The number of participants in each group ranged from 2-4 and as noted on page 9 in the second section, conducting cross cultural research that crosses both language as well as cultural barriers takes time since the translation should be performed as verbatim as possible. This is supported by a reference, no 17, Patton 2002. Twinn 1998 has also followed the concept of "higher involvement" as a reference to their experiences when conducting similar research as noted on page 22, section 2.

Our reasoning for using small focus groups (2-4) for discussions is to get a discussion started within a group of participants and not only focus on the interaction between the researcher and the single participant as is the case with individual interviews. Having the possibility to discuss the research question makes it possible for an individual to consider and reconsider a statement that has been made, this is one of the purposes with focus groups and this is achieved involving two (or more) participants.

The authors of this article have used the same translator for all of their work, but it has been sent for language revision.

Specific comments:

Page 4 last line: MHC is explained in the introduction part on page 4 section 2, but has now been explained in the abstract.

Page 7: the definition of Middle East is now included in the text, and the countries of interest in this article is mentioned on page 8 first section. A new reference has been used.

Page 8 para 1, middle: the wording has been changed
Page 11, top - as mentioned on page 10 an independent translator was used to translate parts of the Arabic text into Swedish making it possible for the author to check for consistency by the interpreter used in the interviews. One interview was used for the validation. This is now clarified in the text.

Page 11 - the comment is valuable and the main- and subcategories are now presented in a table (Table I).

Page 11 - the sub category is now changed on page 15.

Page 11 - A-C and 1-5 is now explained on page 11. To be able to understand if the quotes are from a group or an individual a '-' has been used in an discussion with several participants, as well as the different participants have been added in the dialogue.

Page 18, top - An explanation of Swedish social welfare has now been added to the text on page 18.

Page 21, middle - please see the comment for page 11

Page 22, spelling of R. Small and the use of the reference in the text is altered

Page 23, para 3 - This data is mentioned on page 8 first section, method section and then followed up in the discussion section. Therefore we do not consider it to be new data.

Page 26, at the bottom - it should not be considered as new data. It is a new quote, but belongs to the result section, the fourth main category and last subcategory.

Reviewer Metin Gulmezoglu

General:

The article is now re-checked for grammar and typographic errors.

Due to the explorative design the length of the paper is necessary. The authors have put a great effort in reducing the amount of words, but some words have been added with regard to the other reviewer's comments.

Major revisions:

1. Recall bias: A reference has been added in the method discussion section, page 22 Simkin 1992. It is possible to see, in the reference used, that women seem to have a long memory of matters related to pregnancy and childbirth. The focus group interviews groups were composed in a way that women who had small babies were represented in all groups.

2. The suggestion about the shortening of the title has now been performed.

3. Reasons for not participating were not investigated, but the women stated that they did not have the possibility to participate due to personal reasons, as stated on page 22 last section.

The women had the possibility to choose which language they wanted to use for their interview. The reviewer notes that more interviews were conducted in Swedish - this is not the case. On page 7 this is described in the method section. The three focus group interviews were conducted in Arabic as well as one individual interview. The last four were conducted in Swedish. Thereby the authors do not agree with the notion that the findings are from more adapted immigrants.

Minor essential revisions:

We have thought about moving the quoted text to boxes, but have reconsidered. It is not possible to read the quotes isolated from the rest of the text since the quotes then loose their context. By having the quotes within the text also makes it possible for the reader to judge if the quotes are relevant and/or appropriate. But we have followed the other reviewer's advice to put the main categories as well as the subcategories in
a table on page 11.