Reviewer's report

Title: Striving to promote male involvement in maternal health care in rural and urban settings in Malawi - a qualitative study

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Reviewer: Elisabeth Faxelid

Reviewer's report:

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

The question is interesting but not well defined. The objective is stated differently in the abstract and in the paper but relate to understanding/exploring, describing strategies/approaches employed/used by health care providers/health care facilities in order to invite men/husbands/partners to participate in maternal health care. Despite the different phrasing the result is not totally in accordance with the objective since approaches outside the health care providers/health care facilities power is also described. Either the objective should be changed and made more clear or the result focused to follow the objective.

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

Methods are not well described. First the section on settings is too detailed and should be shortened considerably. Make the justification of the sampling (purposive) short and clear. Why these sites were selected. Seems to be 6 and not 5 sites as far as I can see. Unclear how the last sentence under Participants and recruitment correspond to the first two sentences in the same section. Also ethical issues in this section should fit better under the heading Ethical consideration. Make a table in the beginning of the result section (not in Participants and recruitment section) about background factors. Thematic content analysis is said to be used but the ref is to Qualitative content analysis. These are two different methods for analysis although to some parts similar. But there are specific refs for Thematic content analysis, which should be used. Fig 1 is showing the process of analysis. The first part (meaning unit) is covering at least 3 different aspects. Usually meaning units are shorter and focus on one aspect each. Also the code is not really making justice to the large meaning unit. There are probably much more interesting results to be shown. Make the
analysis more deductive and let the data “talk”. Also the category should be shown in the fig.

3. Are the data sound and well controlled?

As said above I don’t think the data correspond to the objective in a clear way. Several of the strategies reported is not really driven by the health care provider. Furthermore, HIV counselling and STI treatment including partner notification is different from ANC. I think this should be clearly separated. Although pregnant women are counselled and tested for STIs I suggest that you should focus on male involvement in maternal health care and not on HIV/STI. Also there are many studies on partner notification, which is actually a totally different topic. Also the result section is too long and much of the “talk” could be removed in favour of a more focused and “scientific” description of the results. I would also like to see who the person was that provided the quote and from where she/he came. The numbers/codes does not say anything to me.

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

The whole paper should be more stringent and “scientific”. Now it is more as a report. Also qualitative material can and should be reported in a scientific way. Some of the refs are of good scientific standard but not all. Some refs are not correctly written and some are not correctly cited either.

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

Aspects not presented in the result section should not be in the discussion. Also non-participant observations are presented here and noting is stated neither in the method section nor in the result section about this method.

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

Title is fine while the abstract contains one method (non-participatory observations) not described in the paper and also mention five study sites, which should be six. Method of analysis is not mentioned.

7. Is the writing acceptable?

The English needs to be reviewed carefully by an English editor.

Please make your report as constructive and detailed as possible in your comments so that authors have the opportunity to overcome any serious deficiencies that you find and please also divide your comments into the following categories:

• Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

All my comments are major compulsory revisions. I believe the paper needs much more work before being published. But the basis is interesting and is worth being published but written in a better way.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely
related research interests

**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:**

No competing interest