Reviewer's report

Title: A qualitative analysis of men's involvement in maternal and child health as a policy intervention in rural Central Malawi

Version: 1 Date: 04 Oct 2017

Reviewer: Linda Aldoory

Reviewer's report:

I appreciate the hard work the authors took to revise this manuscript. I see many improvements, in particular, with the writing and clarity of concepts.

As I mentioned in my original review, the use of mixed-sex focus groups is troubling. If the topic was nutrition alone, or if authors themselves did not detail power and gender as structures guiding behaviors, then the use of mixed sex groups would have been legitimate within those other contexts as authors claim. But that is not the case here.

You acknowledge in your response and in your paper that there are "constraints" to using mixed-sex groups. But you never actually delve into the power structures that are at play in mixed-sex groups, when the very concept of gender is the alleged topic of your paper and research. The method section describes the mix of participants and number of focus groups on page 9, but you do not mention the concern about mixed sex groups until page 12. Your rationale for why it was okay to use mixed sex groups was that "the research topic was not particularly sensitive..." The topic according to you was power and gender, health and nutrition—how are these topics not sensitive?

You cite an article that claims that mixed sex groups are legitimate, but what was the context of that other study and its topic, for you to suggest that your study and use of mixed sex groups would be comparable to the article you cite? This needs more details for this argument to be made.

You also mention that the mixed sex group was okay to do because more women than men were in the group. Doesn't this contradict the earlier rationale that there is value in mixed gender groups, if so skewed?

Finally, in your explanation about mixed sex groups, there was no strong rationale about the moderators' gender, until the end and it is brief. The authors stated that the participants were not affected by these limitations and that they were comfortable to speak: p. 13 "...the researchers had no reason to believe that the lack of a male facilitator hindered or biased the discussions." Where is the scientific evidence to support this? How do readers know this? Where are the member checks, for example, that can tell us that participants were not "biased"?
While I commend authors for addressing gender and power and I wish for more research that highlights men's involvement in women's health, it seems authors are still not recognizing their complicity in the very gender power structures they are allegedly stating that they are addressing.

**Are the methods appropriate and well described?**
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

**Does the work include the necessary controls?**
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?**
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Unable to assess

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Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

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