Author’s response to reviews

Title: Muslim women’s experiences of maternity services in the UK: Qualitative systematic review and thematic synthesis.

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Author’s response to reviews:

Dear Dr Rhona O’Connell (please see attached file 'responses to reviewer')

Thank you for your reviews. We have considered all of the comments and provide responses below. Revised sections of the manuscript are highlighted to indicate where changes have been made.

Reviewer comment & Response

Reviewer 1

1- introduction section has to be re-phrased esp there is is a repeated sentence. coming from ref 5, 8 - Thank you for alerting us to this repetition, which we have now addressed. We have also edited the introduction to make it more succinct.

2- a simplified definition of thematic synthesis should be provided - The paragraph on thematic synthesis has been heavily revised in response to comments from both reviewers. A brief explanation of qualitative synthesis methods is given before providing further detail on the process of thematic synthesis.

3- last paragraph in the discussion is of no value - The paragraph had been included as part of building trustworthiness in the research, being transparent and demonstrating reflexivity. It is therefore considered relevant to the strengths and limitations however we will be guided by the editorial team regarding whether they wish for this to be omitted.

Reviewer 2
The qualitative synthesis included only 6 studies, a good range of studies is between 10 and 20. The search strategy was accurate but got have been expanded by setting a stage 1 and stage 2 criteria for the inclusion and exclusion of various types of studies pertaining to the given topic. The qualitative synthesis did not clearly differentiate between the First, Second and Third order constructs which is very important. The following paper is suggested as example to improve the methodology and revisiting the qualitative synthesis clearly differentiating between the first and second order constructs and third order interpretations.


Response:

The paragraph on thematic synthesis has been heavily revised in response to comments from both reviewers. A brief explanation of qualitative synthesis methods is given before providing further detail on the process of thematic synthesis. This includes recognising that the process does not use first, second and third order constructs (unlike for example meta-ethnography) although similarities do exist. The reporting used in the manuscript follows the approach used by Thomas and Harden.

The authors believe that a higher number of studies (eg between 10 and 20) is not required for the synthesis to be robust. For example, the ENTREQ reporting statement for synthesis of qualitative research does not make recommendations about the number of included studies (Tong et al., BMC Medical Research Methodology 2012, 12:181). In addition, the GRADE-CERQual guidance for assessing confidence in findings from qualitative evidence syntheses does not make recommendations regarding numbers and instead recognises the need to consider the richness of the included studies (Lewin et al., 2015, PLoS Med 12(10): e1001895). We have added some additional comments to the strengths and limitations to address these concerns.

Regarding stage 1 and stage 2 criteria, the same criteria (Table 2) were used for both stages (i.e. title/abstract and full-text) as described in the text. This follows accepted review methods. Eligibility regarding type of qualitative research (type of study) is shown in Table 2.

Kind regards

Dr Shaima M Hassan