Reviewer’s report

Title: A qualitative study reporting maternal perceptions of the importance of play for healthy growth and development in the first two years of life

Version: 0 Date: 30 Jun 2020

Reviewer's report:

The manuscript describes a qualitative study to understand how mothers perceive play and physical activity during the first two years of life, the ways to promote this behavior and its barriers. However, there are some suggestions that can improve the paper. Thank you for giving an opportunity for me to review this manuscript.

The following are some of my suggestions for improvements:

Introduction:

The introduction is rather poor, with no specific references to other socioeconomic contexts. A broader discussion to different conditions (e.g. Europe, China, Russia) is necessary. More information about the context of Africa would make a better impression. For example, in the last paragraph the authors provided general information about the low- and middle-income settings, but they can specifically more explain it in the context of Africa. The authors could more explain about the "social and family set up, and the structural environment (lack of safe space)" in the last paragraph.

Method:

In what year was the study conducted? The authors have to mention year of conducting the study.
Please clarify the eligibility criteria for the participants.
The authors did not clearly explain about the sapling method. What was the sampling method?
Also, the author didn't write about the inclusion and exclusion criteria
The number of FGD and IDIs should be clearly mentioned.

for the figure 1, more explanation about cross-cutting topics is necessary.

Results:

The authors should mention the number along with the percent. For example, "Most of the mothers (68%) had more than one child. Most children were male (63%)". Also, this sentence is not clear for reader: "were aged 11(7) months". It is not clear what are 11 and 7. Are they mean and standard deviation of children's age?
It is essential to include interviewee's quotations to make statements coherent and strengthen conclusions. For instance: the theme "Gender bias in play" need to be proven based on empirical
data. It is suggested that some of the important quotations by themes and sub-themes also mentioned in the text results.

Discussion:

Address whether there appear to be any cross-country differences or differences between studies done among the same populations. For example in line 26 in the discussion section the authors discussed about the role of gender in the type of play. The authors could discuss is there any cultural reason, e.g., cultural norms for this finding.

In the study limitation, the author did not mention about generalizability of the study.

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Yes

**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.

Yes
Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

I am able to assess the statistics

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

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