**Reviewer’s report**

**Title:** What roles do male partners play in the mothering experiences of women living with mental illness? A qualitative secondary analysis

**Version: 0 Date: 08 Mar 2019**

**Reviewer:** Angus MacBeth

**Reviewer's report:**

This is an interesting paper, combining 3 previous studies of narratives of mothers with mental health diagnoses, to elucidate themes relating to the role of partners. As the data is derived from interviews with the mothers themselves, it is strictly speaking a paper on the women's representation of the role of partners, rather than an exploration of partner's role via their own narratives. This is an important distinction and needs to be clear from the outset (the title may need to be adjusted accordingly). Indeed, it is stated in results p.14. Similarly, to say that results are influenced by mother's perceptions is not strictly accurate - the results are all mother's perceptions.

Intro: This gives a good overview of the literature, but would benefit from having a slightly tighter narrative would make this a more coherent piece. There are points where the language drops slightly in terms of the scientific writing - particularly at manuscript p.5. This should be relatively easy to remedy.

**Method:**

The samples are in some respects quite different, particularly with regard to the experience of children being taken into care. There are therefore implications of combining the sample, particularly when the issue at question is the role played by partners as supports. Further, the first study explicitly enquires into the experience of child removal - this would presumably have primed for very different narratives from the second study on mothering and recovery (e.g. attachment and loss). These differences aren't insurmountable, but would need some structuring in the intro.

Similarly, although the approaches for both primary studies are qualitative, there are methodological differences between a phenomenological approach and grounded theory - these at the very least need to be acknowledged, as the approach impacts on the analyses.

The age range of the children of participant's is rather broad - what does this mean for the interpretation of the analyses?
Results: "A conceptual framework was developed to explain the roles played by partners in the mothering experiences of women living with mental illness. This is depicted diagrammatically in Figure 1 and described below" - how was this achieved, and is the process by which this was achieved not part of the method?

Similarly, the process by which the themes emerged could perhaps be clearer.

The diagnoses are quite broad, and I did wonder about the effect of disorder severity on the data - one would hypothesize that the more complex disorders - bipolar disorder and psychosis - would be associated with a higher risk of removal of the child and accordingly an impact on the narratives.

"The numbers provided indicate the number mothers whose interviews contained data that contributed to each category. Given the interpretive nature of qualitative research and the use of secondary data, this is not assumed to necessarily be the exact number of mothers who actually experienced it" I appreciate what the authors are trying to impart here, but I think it could be stated more clearly.

Some sort of key of participant characteristics to pseudonyms would also potentially help readers.

It is hard to query the themes given that they emerge from the data, but two concerns come to the fore: 1) The themes could perhaps be given some form of theoretical framework, linking the emergent framework to existing theory (e.g. attachment seems relevant here). I appreciate that this is not necessarily in the spirit of grounded theory, but the paper is clearly positioned as a secondary analysis. 2) How much do the themes split according to the status of the children (vis a vis removal to care)? Themes such as "distractor", "dismantler" and "threat" seem on first reading to be unlikely to have emerged from narratives focused around recovery.

Discussion:

"To our knowledge this is the first study to specifically explore the roles of partners in the mothering experiences of women living with mental illness". I'm not sure this is accurate - there is a literature on this issue (e.g. Nicholson et al., Psychiat. Services 1998), although it is not necessarily as clearly stated as in the current study. Indeed, the authors cite this paper.

The emphasis on a more 'balanced and nuanced' view with positive and negative perspectives incorporated is a reasonable finding and I think is a key element of the analysis.
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.

Unable to assess

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.

Not relevant to this manuscript

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

Needs some language corrections before being published

Declaration of competing interests
Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

1. Have you in the past five years received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

2. Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

3. Do you hold or are you currently applying for any patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

4. Have you received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organization that holds or has applied for patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

5. Do you have any other financial competing interests?

6. Do you have any non-financial competing interests in relation to this paper?
If you can answer no to all of the above, write 'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.

No

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal. I understand that my name will be included on my report to the authors and, if the manuscript is accepted for publication, my named report including any attachments I upload will be posted on the website along with the authors' responses. I agree for my report to be made available under an Open Access Creative Commons CC-BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). I understand that any comments which I do not wish to be included in my named report can be included as confidential comments to the editors, which will not be published.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal