Author's response to reviews

Title: Early Motherhood: A Qualitative Study Exploring the Experiences of African Australian Teenage Mothers in Greater Melbourne, Australia

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Responses to reviewers

Reviewer's report 1

Title: Early Motherhood: A Qualitative Study Exploring the Experiences of African Australian Teenage Mothers in Greater Melbourne, Australia

Version: 5

Date: 2 April 2015

Reviewer: Sally Brown

Reviewer's report:

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined? Yes; it is a clear and well defined study. Thank you

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
Yes; qualitative methodology is appropriate, and the descriptions of data gathering and analysis are clear, with justification provided for the methods chosen. Thank you

3. Are the data sound? Yes; quotations are used appropriately. Thank you we made inclusions and made some changes as per the other reviewers comments

4. Do the figures appear to be genuine, i.e. without evidence of manipulation? N/A Thank you

5. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
Yes. Thank you

6. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately
supported by the data?
The discussion is interesting but I feel that it could go further in exploring some of the issues the authors raise. As this was a study with migrant women, the question of migration and integration could be explored in more depth, perhaps. It is mentioned here, partly in relation to absent fathers, but I would be interested to hear much more from the women themselves about how they feel as migrants, and how their status impacts (or not) on their role as mothers. Also, one of the points made early in the paper was that motherhood is a very valued role in African communities, and to become a mother is both normal and desirable, but later on we hear that the women feel shame and are stigmatised and looked down on by the communities - is this solely because they are unmarried? Are the young fathers similarly frowned upon? Is there pressure within the community to marry? I wonder whether the authors could explore this particular issue in more depth, particularly the contradiction between motherhood being valued but these mothers being shamed. The above were considered very valid points and the manuscript has been revised to reflect them. See inclusion in the findings title Cultural Influences; also the section titled Becoming a mother and the section Support from the wider community.

About the point on the pressure to marry this is not possible as these teens were pregnant while unmarried. Thus the frowning as highlighted is because the were not married at the time of their pregnancies.

7. Are limitations of the work clearly stated? Yes. Thank you

8. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished? Yes; Thank you there is scope for additional literature to be included, particularly other qualitative work which challenges the predominantly negative perspective on teenage motherhood.

9. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found? Yes; the title is good and the abstract is clear. Thank you
10. Is the writing acceptable?
There are a few typos which should be picked up by a thorough proof reading, but apart from that, the writing is clear. The paper has been revised and hopefully we have corrected any typos.

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable Thank you

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests: 'I declare that I have no competing interests

Reviewer report 2
Title: Early Motherhood: A Qualitative Study Exploring the Experiences of African Australian Teenage Mothers in Greater Melbourne, Australia

Version: 5

Date: 5 May 2015

Reviewer: Lesley Hoggart

Reviewer's report:
Major Compulsory Revisions.
1. This is an interesting and original paper on an important topic, that I would like to see published. However, I think it could be significantly improved by greater focus. Two major issues are presented: intersectionality that shapes and defines the young mothers' personal experiences; and young mother’s
experiences and accounts of social support networks. There is a somewhat of a mismatch between the data presented (mainly on the social support theme), and the claims in the discussion to have used intersectionality theory to provide ‘a framework whereby the complex and diverse lives of early motherhood could be understood’ (p14). The paper should be re-worked to focus on one of these major issues OR substantially developed to connect the two. The second option would require a significantly longer paper.

The focus of this paper focused on young mothers' personal experiences of motherhood. Intersectionality was used as a theory. Based on your comments and those of the other reviewer, the paper was reworked and refocused on young mothers experiences of motherhood. It was never meant to be on social support. Support from friends and family are a part of those experiences.

2. The authors need to consider their choice of quotations a little more carefully, and expand their analysis of each quotation. The quotations are being left to speak for themselves without enough explanation and analysis of the points being made. Additionally, I found it difficult to match some of the quotations to the point being made. Quotes: on page 7 (Alimatou’s quote would benefit from more context. I think it is being used to indicate mixed experiences, but the examples given seem to be positive); Revised

page 8 (Jessica starts by saying it was easy with just Rosy, but it doesn’t sound that easy. It is not clear when it was easy – with Rosy or before then?); Revised

page 11 (Stephanie’s quote does not seem to fit with the point being made at all. She seems to be talking about men in general when she is making the point about money and them knowing you have a child, rather than the father but this is a section about the baby’s father). Revised

These are the quotes which were the most difficult for me to connect to the narrative, but I think all the quotes could do with further analysis.

All the above sections and quotes have been revised considerably
Minor Essential Revisions

3. The abstract conclusions call on providers and policy makers to support the role of the young mothers’ female relatives, but do not include sisters who are discussed in the findings. Nor is the need for service development mentioned. A statement has been added in the abstract on this.

4. Introduction and literature review: the terms teenage, girls and adolescent are being used interchangeably. These are much debated concepts and definitions and discussions are needed. A section has been included on terminology at the end of the introduction.

5. Two contextual issues mentioned in other literature (certainly in the UK) that are not discussed at all are: social and cultural meanings attached to marriage, and to abortion. Both these issues are surely relevant to the intersectionality discussion. The manuscript has been revised considerably to include this.

6. Data analysis section: more detail is needed on the methodology. Was the thematic analysis really reduced to searching (and counting?) key words? More details on thematic analysis have been added.

7. Methods: a key informant is mentioned, rather out of the blue, on page 12. There is no indication in the methods section that key informants were interviewed. And this is a very specific key informant connected to the Church used to illustrate views of the wider African community. Something needs to be said about strength (or otherwise) of the church in the community. The quote has been removed. The manuscript has also been revised overall and inclusions about the influence of religion and culture in the teenage mothers lives included.

8. Discussion: the claim that the young mothers were also confronting ongoing challenges of settlement in Australia is not well supported by the data.
presented in earlier sections. I think that more work needs to be done to establish what is specific about becoming a young mother in a new country. (This point is related to point 1 above). This section has been revised considerably and new quotes added in the findings to concur with this.

9. Implications for service providers and policy makers (pp.16-17): An important point being made about biological parents being present has not really been demonstrated by the data presented, or by other literature. This has been included in the revised manuscript.

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

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published: We have revised the paper and hopefully have corrected most of the typing errors

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician. Thank you

Declaration of competing interests: I declare that I have no competing interests Thank you