Reviewer's report

Title: A reflection of ethical and methodological challenges of using separate interviews with adolescent-older carer dyads in rural South Africa

Version: 0 Date: 28 Jan 2019

Reviewer: Jantina De Vries

Reviewer's report:

Review of "Are you going to tell my grandmother that I am pregnant?": Ethical and methodological challenges of research with adolescents and their older carers in rural South Africa

Major comments:

- One overall critique of the paper is that in many of the sections, you seem to have limited yourself to only presenting the particular manifestation of an ethical or methodological issue in your study, without also attempting to a) link your experiences to the broader methodological literature around dyad interviews, if there is such a literature and b) drawing some broader lessons learnt or recommendations for challenges in and opportunities for conducting this research in an LMIC. Having read this manuscript, I now know about the particular issues you faced and how you addressed them, but I don't really feel like I have broader insight into the opportunities for dyad research in SA or in LMICs in general. Although you do some of this work in the Discussion, I think your manuscript could be enriched if you wove this critical narrative into your paper. I would really urge you to look at each of the issues you identified and try to situate those issues better in the broader (ethnographic and dyad-specific) literature. A good example is the final issue you raise, about interviewers preferring one side of the dyad more than another (e.g. in this case, feeling more comfortable with and sympathetic towards the older carers than the adolescents). Have others also identified this as a methodological issue in dyad research? Is this an issue that is more likely to arise in more strongly hierarchical societies? How does gender play into this? And, importantly, how would you resolve this issue in future?

A second example is the issue of reciprocity obligations (see also comment lower). How has this issue described by other ethnographic authors? See for instance Nyambedha, E. O. Ethical dilemmas of social science research on AIDS and orphanhood in Western Kenya. Social Science & Medicine 67, 771-779, doi:DOI: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2008.02.024 (2008) where he works through some similar issues. Also Huisman, K. "Does This Mean You're Not Going to Come Visit Me Anymore?": An Inquiry into an Ethics of Reciprocity and Positionality in Feminist

- In line with that comment: Whilst the stated main aim of this paper is to offer a methodological and ethical critique of the use of dyad interviewing methods in an LMIC, this does not stand out very clearly in the title or in the abstract as currently phrased. E.g. the use of a quote in the title, whilst very appealing, suggests to me that this paper will present an analysis of interview data - and a similar suggestion is created in the abstract. I would strongly suggest that you rephrase the title and abstract somewhat to make it clear that a) this is a methodological and ethical critique of b) the use of dyad interviewing methods in c) an LMIC. I.e. I would suggest that you much more strongly position this as a methods paper (where the actual research you did is secondary to that objective).

- Line 273: I wonder if you could add a sentence there to indicate whether you approached any adolescents (or even older carers) who subsequently refused? Did you only approach 6 dyads and did all those approached consent to participate (if so, that would suggest that your concern may be real). Also, maybe you probed this concern with the adolescent participants in the duration of the study and if you did, perhaps you could share here whether they thought this was a concern.

- A related question is whether the carers were actually aware that their dependents were participating in the DREAMS programme? Were they likely to know the facilitators? How did the facilitators get their contact details?

- Is the 'lack of confidentiality between members' really an ethical issue in this study? If the two members of the dyad decided to share what happened in their interview then surely this wouldn't normally constitute a breach of confidentiality (if the information they share pertains to them)? You suggest in your Discussion that other authors may have written about this as an ethical issue in dyad research - if so, it would be good to describe the nature of that concern more broadly. If not, I would suggest taking out that paragraph;

- The issue you raise in the section 'lack of understanding' (line 379f) is a serious one and requires much more elaboration, including referencing. I think you touch on two important issues here. One is an expectation of reciprocity - particularly important in the African research context, and an issue that is not foreign to ethnographers at all hence the suggestion that you refer to other ethnographic work. The second is the importance of trust, and a failure to respect or engage with reciprocity obligations may translate into a breakdown of trust, which could ultimately be harmful for research as a whole. I understand that in the research you conducted, you did not have funds or time to connect the carers to the appropriate services, but from how you have written this paragraph, it sounds like you may have been uncomfortable with this. Considering that this is a methods paper, I think you need to be more straightforward and directive about how this issue should have been resolved, even if this includes a critique of your own work. To me,
reiterating that explaining to participants that 'it's not my problem as a researcher to do this' seems wholly insufficient and, to be honest, rather disrespectful and a bit opportunistic. Are there other ways in which this issue could have been resolved? If you were to do the same research again (including planning the budget), how would you do this differently?

- I don't really feel that your paper provided enough insight into the nuances of the dyadic method and the methodological challenges to support this particular conclusion "Therefore, the methodological and ethical challenges associated with a dyadic approach are not issues which can be resolved through the method. They are both a feature of the experience and a feature of the relational agency." I think you really need to explain this better. E.g. doesn't the dyad method specifically probe relational agency and relationships (see e.g. your argument for more dyadic research in line 73f)? I don't think you can both say that 'the dyadic method aims to study relational agency' and then say that any ethical issues that arise out of it 'are not to do with the method but with the relational agency'.

Minor comments:

- I like your use of 'negotiate' in relation to seeking informed consent (line 181) because this may be reflective of how one actually seeks consent for research. However, you may also open a can of worms and some readers may wonder what you mean by that. Perhaps you should consider changing 'negotiate consent' to 'seek consent'.

- Line 189: conducting the interview 'in private' (not: in privacy)

- Line 208: until that point, you say you focus on 'methodological and ethical challenges' so maybe add that to this sentence also.

- Line 319 - 'they' should be 'there'?

- Line 336 "Secondly, confidence was also secured through the practice of confidentiality by the interviewer" - I am not sure what that sentence means?

- Line 370: what does it mean that this was a 'longitudinal' dyadic study?

- Line 463 "unintended preferences of individual participants may have occurred" - I am not sure what you mean by that phrase?

- Line 508-510: I am not sure what you mean with that sentence. Who would 'the audience' be in this case?

- Line 514 - 'because they were being protective'. When you introduced this issue in the main text, you were careful not to attribute a reason for why the adolescents did not reveal their older carer's HIV status. How do you know that this was the reason? It could also have been e.g.
social stigma, or perhaps even an artefact of the age of the interviewer (it would be inappropriate to disclose such information across age lines). I would suggest taking this out here.

- I find that whole section (lines 512-522) somewhat speculative without contributing much substance to the discussion. For instance, I don't think it is quite clear how you understand the adolescent's silence as being a product of 'relational agency' and this is also not clear from the main text. I would actually urge you to consider taking those lines out completely. Even the lines that immediately follow this section (e.g. 522-528) are difficult to follow, which could partly be because it presumes far greater knowledge of the project data than what was presented in the manuscript, so there to I would suggest either careful rewording or taking this out. If you decide to keep, then please bear in mind that the readers have not necessarily read a paper reporting on the main study results and so you will need to explain your insights in a bit more detail.

- Line 543: what do you mean when you say that the challenges described 'capture the essence of the experience'? Of which experience?

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

Yes

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?
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Yes

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Not relevant to this manuscript

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