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: 11 Feb 2019

Reviewer: Jennifer Van Nuil

Reviewer's report:

The authors describe a range of the ethical and methodological challenges encountered during an ethnographic study using dyadic interviews with adolescents and older cross-generation caregivers. The challenges (both methodological and ethical) were combined in the findings and related to recruitment challenges, issues with the consent process, how to best maintain confidentiality, the implications and challenges of holding separate interviews, and the complex interactions between the interviewer and interviewees. The study from which the challenges were encountered took place in rural South Africa with six dyads (adolescent-caregiver) who were part of DREAMS initiative and involved multiple separate interviews as well as participant observation. To conclude the authors state that the challenges they encountered are actually features of the complex nature of the relationships.

I have three main comments and a few minor comments:

Depth - Findings and Management of Challenges: I suggest to add more about the experiences encountered and how it informed the challenges and management of such challenges, for some of the results discussed. For example, in lines 244 - 256 re sampling bias - did the researchers feel that there was sampling bias during the recruitment or was sampling bias more of a concern prior to the fieldwork? Did the interviewer speak with participants about potential coercion (see line 259) or suspect that there was coercion during recruitment and how were these scenarios managed? Were there any cases of unintended disclosure of information within the pair by the interviewer - how did this play out? Or further, how was confidentiality maintained during dissemination, if findings were discussed with the participants or within the communities? Were these disclosure risks challenging to explain during consent when describing how information will be used and disseminated?

I think it is quite a different process to think about possible ethical and methodological challenges that might arise (based on literature and previous experiences) and then proactively
make choices about the study conduct prior to starting the study than facing challenges during the study and having to adjust while the study is on-going. The latter are often the challenges that likely have not been identified in previous studies (unanticipated) and could be interesting for other researchers to consider when designing their future work (possible management strategies for discussion section?). It would be interesting if this were more clearly spelled out in the paper.

Scope - Reality of (Qualitative) Research: A few of the points raised in the paper are common to qualitative and other research more generally. If the authors could add more explicit linkage between the challenge described and the methodology, context, etc, then the link back to the main objective of the paper will be better maintained. For example, in many research situations, the consent process needs to be tailored to the individual person's needs. How is the process more or less (ethically or methodologically) complex? Another example is sampling bias, which is a concern in many studies that use programme facilitators for recruitment but what might be an interesting ethical and/or methodological conversation is about using participant driven sampling with a sample size of six pairs. How were the six pairs ultimately recruited into the study and what were the implications of that choice (e.g. if all the dyads knew each other because they were all referred from each other, how to maintain confidentiality of results).

Discussion Considerations: Overall, the authors raise many methodological issues with this type of method but I would expect more elaboration, in the discussion section, on the larger ethical issues related to this type of research and how these issues fit in with other work done on both similar ethics topics and studies using this methodology. For example, what were the ethical implications of recruiting the participants in the way that was done, even though it may have been socially acceptable? How does the discussion on confidentiality link to other literature (lines 502-535) from other contexts? Ultimately do you think it was a good approach to use separate interviews?

It might also be interesting for the authors to grapple more with their conclusion that the challenges are "features of the relationships between dyads rather than weaknesses of the dyadic approach" (line 561-562, also lines 537-543). If this is one of the main conclusions, then it might be worthwhile to go back through the paper and see where and how each finding section demonstrates this idea. If this idea was entangled within the findings, I think it would tie the piece together well.
Minor points:

- In the introduction, I suggest to include the ethical challenges that are specific to your topic, methods, etc. rather than the selection of ethical dilemmas in LMIC listed in lines 100-107.

- Methods description: It might be good to describe the analysis process for the results presented in this paper instead of solely listing the analysis process for results which are not described within this paper.

- Line 301 - do you think this is a power dynamic or the nature of the caregiver/adolescent relationship or parenting style?

- Is it outside of the "norm" for dyads to share information they relayed during the interviews with each other outside of the study context (re lines 368-376)? I would imagine that it would be good if the ideas from the interviews opened a dialogue between the caregiver and the adolescent, outside of the study. I ask because I am curious. If it is a known part of the method, is this really a challenge?

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.

Unable to assess

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

No

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:

Acceptable
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.

I declare that I have no competing interests

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