Reviewer's report

Title: The contribution of female community health volunteers (FCHVs) to maternity care in Nepal: a qualitative study

Version: 0 Date: 05 May 2017

Reviewer: Sally Theobald

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting study that presents the voiced and perspectives of FCHVs and their role in promoting maternal health in 2 different Nepali settings. I think it needs to be improved as follows:
1. In the methods - the skill set of the interviewer is not discussed - as the quality of qualitative research is directly linked to the skills of the researcher this is an omission. Further details re SP are needed here - also did SP conduct the FGDs too. Any further insights into processes to enhance the trustworthiness of the research endeavour would be helpful
2. Ethical approval should be included in the methods; plus, a discussion of any ethical issues that emerged
3. The discussion on transferability of the research findings both within and beyond Nepal would be helped by more rich description of the research sites.
4. More nuance in the analysis and hence the results would strengthen the paper. The authors talk about 'underlying themes' in the thematic analysis process but these are not clear in the results. The analytical weight of different themes and findings is also not clear - i.e. the extent to which views are common or atypical and the triangulation across and between different groups of participants could also be clearer and would add to the credibility and robustness of the results
5. The discussion starts by saying qualitative research is always limited - why so? The section on limitations should come at the end and begin with an overview of the key findings - what is new/why this is a contribution to knowledge
6. The paper would be strengthened with some gender analysis - which should go throughout. So, in the introduction explain the background to FCHVs - why all women? And how does this compare to male CHWs (who I understand are paid in Nepal? Is that right?). Gender and volunteerism is a key theme in the literature and these links should be made and will help with the discussion, including the focus on empowerment. The concepts from female health economists of women's labour being infinitely elastic - and justice and equity here (where women are having to pay other sot work on the farms etc.) will be helpful to review. Also, how was gender thought about/addressed in the research process and interactions with study participants?
7. Another body of literature which would help strengthen the discussion is around trust and how this is negotiated between the FHCVs and the women they serve and the health system they represent. This can link also to the pros and cons of FCHVs' embedded positionalities within communities (i.e. being on call 24/7).
8. A thorough English edit is required
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.

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
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