Reviewer's report

Title: Improving Local Health through Community Health Workers in Cambodia: Challenges and Solutions

Version: 3 Date: 30 Oct 2017

Reviewer: A N Bazzano

Reviewer's report:

The authors have made a number of important edits and additions to the paper that have improved it. However, certain issues remain and need to be addressed before the publication can be accepted.

1. Cambodia is NOT a low income country anymore. As of the time of publication in 2017 it is a lower-middle income country and the wrong World Bank references are cited for this. Please see (and cite) the correct reference: https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups

2. The wording that describes Kratie and Mondulkiri has been improved, but still contains no reference to these provinces being home to the largest population of ethnic minority groups in the country. Please add this, as later there is reference to "Khmer" and "Muslim".

3. Please revise the wording "three Khmer research assistants" to clarify--are these Cambodians who are ethnically Khmer/who speak Khmer? Later you note that there are Muslim and Khmer ethnic communities, though perhaps Cham would have been more accurate? Perhaps you mean to say that "three Cambodian research assistants who conducted qualitative work in Khmer language"?? Also, given that many people in the study sites of these provinces speak languages other than Khmer (ethnic minorities) it will be important to note that the participants were all Khmer speakers, or if not, how you overcame this limitation to qualitative research. Please include this in the methods section.
3. In these provinces of Cambodia, religion and ethnicity (especially for ethnic minority) are strongly linked with all facets of health and access to services, as well as community relations around accessing health--this has been documented previously in the literature. It is an important issue and if the researchers did not include information on any of this in their data collection, it should be listed in the limitation section as a major limitation.

4. Characteristics of focus group and interview participants should be moved to the Findings section, and unfortunately do not include any information on ethnic group or religion, previously mentioned.

5. The information on coding and analysis is still too sparse. There is no citation or reference to a checklist for qualitative research such as COREQ or CASP. More detail should be added on what is meant by "thematic open coding" and a clearer citation provided to a reference here (rather than a textbook which lists multiple methods and theories).

6. In what way were findings "triangulated" using this data--method triangulation, analysis triangulation? There is controversy over the use of the term "triangulation" to address validity. Again, a reference and more specific wording should be used, given that this is the main technique used for the analysis of the manuscript data and that there are many different ways to analyse qualitative data--the reader wants to know what method was used.

7. Despite the author's response, there is no information provided on audio recording or transcription--how the focus groups and interviews were recorded (by audio, notes, who wrote the notes, etc..). This is an important omission.

8. It is unacceptable for quotes to have no attribution to individuals, including non-identifying participant characteristics. This is a must and the paper should not be published without these. The reader should be given information about the individual from whom the quote comes, such as age, home province, job role/years in job, and other data on the participant. If this is missing from the data set it could indicate the researchers may not have been careful enough in their data handling.
8. The authors have not mentioned the COREQ checklist nor any alternative like the CASP checklist to address lack of detail and explicit information on the qualitative methodology, and this must be done. Then it should be mentioned that this has been done in the manuscript, and a reference to that checklist should be included.

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