Reviewer’s report

Title: A qualitative study of community elders’ perceptions about the underutilization of formal maternal care and maternal death in rural Nigeria

Version: 0 Date: 09 Jul 2019

Reviewer: Erin Hunter

Reviewer's report:

The study qualitatively explores the perspectives of community elders in two rural locales in Nigeria concerning causes of maternal deaths, reasons for not using formal maternity care, and potential solutions for addressing the low utilization of formal maternity care services. The authors posit that community elders hold a tremendous amount of influence within their communities, and thus their perspectives should be taken into account when developing acceptable interventions to improve care-seeking from skilled providers. This perspective may be less explored in the existing literature, especially since the study primarily involved male study participants. The manuscript may make a contribution to the literature in this respect, however I would recommend several points of revision to strengthen the article (itemized below). I would note that the authors did a thorough job in describing their qualitative methodology, which will allow readers to make informed judgments on the study's rigor. Although the manuscript mentioned that a COREQ checklist was included as an attachment, I did not see it to review.

1. Line 21 of Plain English Summary: "This study conducted…” Consider revising this phrase, since a "study" cannot conduct a methodology.

2. Line 9 of Participants and Recruitment: "9" should be written out as "nine," since it begins the sentence.

3. Line 51 of Data Collection (Page 7): Should the word "construct" be "construction" in this sentence?

4. Lines 7-15 of Data Collection (Page 8): If these sentences refer to the findings of the aforementioned review of CCs (reference 38), then it should be re-cited in these sentences so this is clearer.

5. Data Collection: I would recommend describing who the facilitators were for the CCs. Were they community members and/or part of the research team? What training did they have? Had they previously been known to the elders in the communities where the CCs were conducted?

6. Second quote on page 12: "form" should be "from"

7. Line 12 on Page 13: "appropriative" should be "appropriate"
8. The first few sentences of the "Quality of Care" section in the findings seem to resonate more with the section on "Accessibility."

9. Line 43 of page 14: Consider using a different word than "invigorated." Invigorate means "give strength or energy to," which does not make sense in the sentence.

10. Lack of knowledge: I would recommend the authors consider revising the section on "lack of knowledge." Indeed it appears that the women had a lot of knowledge, it just did not necessarily align with the biomedical model of the health facilities.

11. Line 54 on page 14: "Some intended to give birth until they were weak or felt too tired from giving birth." This sentence was confusing at first read. Consider revising to make clearer that "intended to give birth" refers to having additional children.

12. Line 40 on page 15: Consider removing "fickle"

13. Consider including a label indicating whether each quote was from a male or female study participant

14. Are the authors (those who conducted the analysis) familiar with the local languages in which the CCs were conducted? Were glossaries maintained in transcripts for words without direct translations into English? Who performed the translations and were the quality/fidelity of the translations checked?

15. It would be interesting to see a discussion of how the perspectives of the community elders may be different or the same (and why) from other stakeholders. There are many existing studies on barriers to accessing maternity care; what does this study really add to our understanding?

16. In its current form, the broad policy recommendations appear a bit too weak and are not adding anything particularly new to the literature base. I would be interested to see the following statement unpacked more instead: "With the influence of opinion leaders on reproductive health decisions in the household and the community to certain extents, they should be informed and involved in the design and implementation of local interventions."

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