Reviewer's report

**Title:** Husbands in the labour ward: views and experiences of husbands in urban hospitals in southern Malawi - qualitative study.

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 15 August 2012

**Reviewer:** Jennifer Fenwick

**Reviewer’s report:**

I enjoyed reading your paper. The topic is an interesting one and adds to the current debate as to the role of male partners supporting women during the labour and birth process. I commend you for undertaking the study. I have made a number of recommendations. They are made in the spirit of assisting you strengthen your manuscript as you work towards publication.

Discretionary revisions

**Language**

Please reconsider using ‘male partners’ rather than ‘husbands’ if culturally appropriate. Wives – then becomes woman or female partner

Consider using the word ‘findings’ instead of ‘results’ – more aligned with qualitative work

Consider using birth rather than delivery where appropriate

Use the work ‘themes’ rather than categories

**Method**

I’m just wondering whether a little more information on how the ‘private’ maternity system works be helpful to the reader to increase understanding of the context of care provision. Ie do all women have a midwife care for them in labour? Do midwives provide primary care or is it obstetric lead care? Outcomes improved? Payment? Intervention rates?

**Minor Essential Revisions**

**Title**

Consider rewording slightly as there are two concepts presented in the current heading – experiences of both labour ward as well as hospitals. You could perhaps be more specific

Examples;

Malawian men’s views and experiences of attending the birth of their child: A qualitative study
Urban men’s view’s and experiences of attending the birth of their child: A qualitative study undertaken in southern Malawi

References
There are only two cited references dated after 2008. Although I acknowledge the work undertaken with men and childbirth is somewhat limited I believe you work would be strengthen considerable with some more up to date references. Also a number of ‘&’ appear in references in the body of the text… need to be So and So… Any direct quotes need to be accompanied by ‘page numbers’

English language
Your paper is generally very well written. The paper would benefit however from some further minor revisions in terms of English grammar and syntax.

Use past tense throughout the manuscript., ie ‘were’ instead of ‘are’

Abstract
In the methods section add… This studied used a descriptive qualitative approach…… Content analysis was used to analysis the data set.

Background
Last sentence in paragraph one is out of context 2nd paragraph – second sentence.. the world ‘Early’ appears but nothing further. This seem error appears later in the paragraph as well

2nd paragraph 9th sentence – needs a reference. Also sentences at the end of this paragraph are out of context to one another. There are a number of concepts you are talking about in here. This needs re wording / restructuring.

Page 4 2nd paragraph. The last sentence needs to be moved up earlier.
With the Nepal example.. similarly not the right word. Suggest something like..

Birth practices in Nepal provide another example of cultural differences. In this country the birthing woman is considered to be ‘polluted’. As a result the woman is required to labour and birth alone attending to all her own needs. Not even families members are allowed to be present and/or touch the woman and this continues for a number weeks after birth

References 15 and 16 – have you used these correctly? The way you have structured the sentence reads as if men responsible for positive outcomes, lower perceptions of pain and reduced use of analgesia? My recall is that this a result of continuous support mostly provided women / doulas / midwives? I might be incorrect – just clarify. There is some evidence that the presence of men (alone without other female support) increase women’s use of analgesia.
Method
Integrate the material under heading ‘sample size’ into next section. Use of heading ‘sample size’ not really appropriate in this work. Text on saturation is of course very relevant.

Being an indigenous Malawian was an inclusion criterion (page 6)

Page 6 – last sentence needs restructuring

Ethical considerations
Too many ‘they’. 2nd last sentence use ‘men’

Results
Use a table to present some of the participant characteristics / demographics. Also when you use number like this you need to use an ‘n’. For example (n=5)
State how many me were first time fathers? As opposed to once again fathers
Provide details on type / mode of birth their partners had and any other relevant details
Interview time from birth?
Income status

Change heading ‘thematic analysis’ to ‘Themes’. You did a content analysis not ‘thematic analysis’ – they are different.

Major Compulsory Revisions

Assumptions. I would like to suggest your team consider, in more depth, the call you make to move from a ‘woman centred’ approach to a ‘couple centred’ approach (also appears in first paragraph of abstract, p5)

Internationally from a midwifery perspective ‘woman centered’ means caring for the woman, her baby and family. I think the evidence is quite clear that we often struggle to deliver quality woman centred care. More often than not it is about the institution and ‘others’ agendas. In resource rich countries this is certainly reflected in the escalating intervention rates.

In countries where men have been more involved in the birth of their child for sometime the evidence suggests that men continue to struggle - not only with their feelings of anxiety and fear around the labour process but also with being ignored and marginalized by health care professionals. I think its important that we consider how we can improve the care we provide to expectant fathers thus enhancing their experiences but this should take place in the context of ultimately improving the quality of midwifery care we provide to childbearing women. Woman centered care thus means making sure that we consider and engage in an appropriate way with partners, families and friends – understanding how these
people may influence and impact on woman’s childbearing journey.

This leads on to the statement your team has made about partners / husbands compensating for shortages in midwifery care and/or allowing midwives to concentrate on the physical and technical aspects of the labour and delivery (page 14). Please reflect on this statement and the message it sends to the profession and the women we care for.

Relational engaged connected midwifery care is the essence of ‘being with woman’. The relationship we share with a woman is both the method and context though which we provide care. Where midwives only meet women’s physical needs though technical skills we see care that is de-humaised and devoid of respect, sensitivity and compassion.

In the light of these statements I would like to suggest that your team re consider the arguments you put forward with greater reference to the current literature and your own cultural context. I think many of us working in resource rich countries would suggest that society’s expectation that ‘men’ attend the birth, in many cases as a ‘lone’ support, needs through and extensive critique. In fact some of your findings resonate closely with much of the contemporary work. Strategies such as standardized hospital based antenatal education etc., have, on the whole, not made a difference.

I guess I’m asking you to reconsider the basis on which you say you built the study… page 5.. First and foremost it should be an exploration into men’s beliefs and experiences… to inform thinking and understanding of how Malawi men see their role in the process of labour and birth rather than jumping straight to changing to couple centered care and the argument that all men should be facilitated to do this?

Background

page 4 1st paragraph…. 2nd sentence. If this is a direct quote then it requires a page number to accompany the reference.

Also – Seel reference – this is 1986? I’m presuming in the west? Make this clear.

Method

Explain and reference the technique of ‘snow ball sampling’

Data collection

Provide an example of the questions asked and/or consider including all the questions in appendix or ‘box’

Data analysis

The meaning of ‘errors’ is not clear in this context

Nvivo is a data storage and management system - you actually have to do the analysis. Just re phrase slightly
How was ‘trustworthiness’ maintained throughout the data analysis process?

Results / Findings

Motivation
Page 9 Move the quote about ‘curiosity’ to just after talking about this and then provide additional data to support other concepts.

There are some grammatical errors that need attention

Positive experience
Lead in sentence would be helpful.
Remove ‘as they and witness one’
Again some grammatical errors here need to be correct to enhance readability and flow of analysis

Negative experience
Lead in sentence. For example. Men were asked to describe......
1st sentence needs rewording – doesn’t make sense
What feelings?... unfamiliar environment .... hospital equipment.... procedure... are these the things men found difficult? Created feeling of ???....

Example
Commonly men stated they felt uncomfortable and somewhat distressed during some of the routine procedures undertaken during their wife’s labour and birth. For example vaginal examinations were perceived as ‘intrusive’; an invasion of privacy. While men realised that these were necessary to assess the progress of labour they were nonetheless confronted and described feeling ashamed and embarrassed

Page 10 provide an example to support the statements around fear and birth mode.

Page 11 last paragraph – add in the word ‘perceived’. Some men perceived that they were labelled..

Issues pertaining to ‘lack of active involvement’ in decision making need to be mentioned in the discussion

Reflection and resolution
The quote about the twin babies is out of context. This need better explanation

Discussion
Define ‘ordinary’ Malawian men
How does your study support the statement...participants demonstrated that
gendered behaviour changes over time?

1st paragraph 4th sentence – this does not make sense?

What’s an enabling environment?

See comments at the start of this section

Page 14 2nd paragraph – 2nd sentence – this statement us not supported in the data you presented

Page 15 2nd paragraph – last sentence – expand on this statement. It’s important to discuss both sides – especially as some of your data suggests quite negative experiences – that are reflective of other international literature.

Reference 34 – Ok expand and tell the reader a little more about this study – given my comments in the above section.

Limitations

The time frame of 24 months post birth needs to be identified up earlier in the work.

I hope you find these comments helpful. Best wishes with this and future work.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.