Author's response to reviews

Title: Illiterate mothers-in-law's role in antenatal care decision-making in Nepal: A qualitative study

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Author's response to reviews: see over
To,
Chief Editor,
BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth

Title: Illiterate mothers-in-law’s role in antenatal care decision-making in Nepal: A qualitative study

Dear Editor,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a revised manuscript. Please find the attached article entitled "Illiterate mothers-in-law’s role in antenatal care decision-making in Nepal: A qualitative study".

All three reviewers’ comments have been considered and incorporated into the paper which has been edited by a native English speaker. I believe that the improvements meet the requirements for publication. We attach our responses to the editorial request and other three reviewers’ comments. Please feel free to contact us if you need any further clarification.

Thank you for kind help.

Yours sincerely,
Response to the Editorial request

1. Now the revised version of the manuscript has been proof-read by a native English speaker

Reviewer's report
Reviewer: Julie Cwikel
Reviewer's report:
1. the authors well defined?
The question is well defined and the methods are appropriate for this type of study. What disturbs me about this article is the very strong correlation between mother-in-laws being illiterate and mothers being partly literate and fathers being completely literate. Given that it is a qualitative study, there are not enough cases so that we can test the notion that the mother–in-law's role is more a function of illiteracy and lack of understanding of the importance of antenatal care than their larger social role.

AUTHORS’ REPLY: We agree, but it is not the case that we have purposively selected only mothers-in-law who are illiterate in this qualitative study. We should have made it clearer that there are no mothers-in-law in the rural area who are literate! We have added the explanation that the generation of rural mothers-in-law who are around 60 years old are all illiterate (see page 26). We would add, not in the text but as an additional illustration of the state of education in Nepal, that there was not a single university in the 1950s or early 1960s in the whole country!

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described? It might be advisable to use more commonly cited materials in describing the methods used instead of the relatively esoteric materials cited (refs 23-26). See the Malawi article mentioned below for more standard methods texts.

AUTHORS’ REPLY: We have rewritten this section and added several additional methods papers. We disagree with the reviewers that all these are esoteric; Mays and Pope, for example, are the most widely quoted authors on qualitative methods in the field of health services research in the UK.

3. Are the data sound?
I have a problem with the data because of the complete overlap between lack of formal education among the mothers-in-law. This needs to be addressed in the discussion and limitations of the study.

AUTHORS’ REPLY: See reply above. The literacy rates in Nepal have gone up over the past five decades, so part of the difference is now generational, i.e. mothers-in-law are older and therefore far less likely to be educated than their daughters-in-law. (see page 26). In addition, young women are less likely to be literate than young men and rural women are less likely to be literate than urban women of the same generation.
4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition? Yes.
5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
   The discussion does not address how it is possible to change behaviors, attitudes and cognitions among mothers-in-law. This may be a "generation effect" that should be addressed as such. In our work with pregnant and post-partum women, we also run up against the grandmothers' generation individuals who say "why should I join your volunteer program (to give one on one support) when I didn't have this kind of support when I was pregnant?". We try to soften them up by remarking "don't you wish you had had such support?" It doesn't always manage to change minds but perhaps there is a way to develop "grandmother health education" by including some of the more positive grandmothers who show some empathy for their daughter-in-laws. Another option: show the strong connection between antenatal care and good birth outcome and attended birth and develop some positive, upbeat outreach to get to the grandmothers generation. Again, the article on Malawi is informative on this issue too (see below).
   **AUTHORS’ REPLY: We have now addressed these issues in our discussion on pages 26-27.**

What is the importance of this work if it doesn't address how things might be different with health education focused on the grandmothers' generation? There is a parallel work recently on grandmothers (mothers-in-law) in Malawi in which they go beyond the data collected to suggest ways of building interventions that address the role of the grandmothers.

Please incorporate this paper which is very parallel (but addresses post-partum feeding issues) in literature review and discussion.

Kerr, Rachel Bezman et al. (2008). "We grandmothers know plenty..." Social Science and Medicine, 1095-1105.

**AUTHORS’ REPLY: This reference has been added and it has been quoted in the text**

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated? See #3 above. A larger sample and a quantitative research design might have addressed these issues and should be included in the limitations.

**AUTHORS’ REPLY: We have now included the limitations of purposive and convenience sampling which is typically used in qualitative studies of hard to reach populations. Had this been a quantitative study, the fact that all of the mothers-in-law – of users and non-users – were illiterate would have been a problem. In this case however, it enabled us to concentrate on other factors such as the meanings of ANC for them and the perceptions of the daughters–in-law’s place in the domestic hierarchy.**

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished? It seemed so.
8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found? Not exactly.
Because of the overlap between grandmothers and illiteracy, this should be acknowledged in the abstract as well.

**AUTHORS’ REPLY:** We have changed the abstract to reflect that mothers-in-law were illiterate and we have changed the title to reflect this too: Illiterate mothers-in-law’s role in antenatal care decision-making in Nepal: A qualitative study

9. Is the writing acceptable?
There are lots of typos throughout the manuscript.
Examples - e.g. p. 12- "Elevated? family status"
p. 21 "health care., Hence"
p. 29 – "Morbidityin"
p. 30 "husband'sinvolvement" and similar types of problems in the bibliography.
**AUTHORS’ REPLY:** These have been corrected

Reviewer two
Reviewer's report
Title: Mothers-in-law’s role in antenatal care decision-making in Nepal: A qualitative study
Version: 2 Date: 5 February 2010
Reviewer: Chusri Kuchaisit
Reviewer's report:
• Major Compulsory Revisions
1. The purpose of this study is to explore the role that mothers-in-law play in the decision to utilize ANC service. However, there is no supportive data to determine how well the research questions address the stated aims outlined in the abstract.
**AUTHORS’ REPLY:** This was not the sole purpose of the study. This has been reworded in the revised methods section.

2. The qualitative research method is appropriate. However, a methodological challenge in cross-language qualitative research still remains. After being interviewed by a researcher who was a native Napali speaker, the recordings were transcribed and translated into English. To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, the authors should provide information regarding conceptual equivalence; the translation method; and the credentials & roles of the translators.
**AUTHORS’ REPLY:** This has been done. We have added information on the translation process in both the methods section (p8) and the strengths and limitations sections (p21-22).

Furthermore, It would be better of the author illustrate some more detail: - clearly state of the study setting: for example; where is the ANC clinic and sample place/hometown? This study did not tell us about the target population setting which is effect to the population context; clearly state of the period of collecting data.
**AUTHORS’ REPLY:** This information about time and place of data collection has been added

Another comment the author should describe about the content validity of semi-structure questionnaire.
AUTHORS’ REPLY: The questionnaire was simply to gain some factual information as background to interviews eg. age, marital status, number of children. We did not assess content validity.

On page 8 we have added the following text:
The questionnaire was used to ascertain socio-demographic information about both ANC service users and non-users (copy available from first author), reducing the length of the in-depth interview and guiding its content. As we planned a predominantly qualitative study with relatively low numbers of interviewees it was envisaged that no statistical analysis would be conducted comparing any of the groups, construct validity of the instrument was a lesser concern.

3. To ensure richness in the data, purposive sampling is appropriate. However, the authors did not explicitly describe the inclusion/exclusion criteria used to select the samples. Three groups of samples (users vs. nonuser of ANC who were pregnant or have a child younger than one year; women vs. family members; and rural vs. urban; page 6) were selected to participate in this study.

But, no explicit definition of family members, rural, and urban was established.

AUTHORS’ REPLY: We have added more detail, but more importantly we had changed the order of the paragraph to make our sampling approach clearer (see page 7)

Furthermore, with the diversities of sample characteristics, the authors should justify that the size of the samples were sufficient to reach saturation

AUTHORS’ REPLY: In fact time and finances meant that the MILs and husbands were not sufficient to reach saturation. We have added to methods and limitations that with hindsight we should have tried to find a few more mothers-in-law who were positive towards ANC and tried to distil what it is that made them more open to ANC.

4. The adequacy of the data to support the discussion and conclusions is difficult to determine. Because the researchers seem to draw a stronger conclusion than is explicitly supported in the provided quotes, the implication is that the participants meant something that goes beyond the quotes. However, no mechanism is provided in which the participants can confirm this. For instance, one participant still used ANC services even though she had lots of household work (page 9). The mother-in-law of one participant that made use of ANC services expected the pregnant woman to continue with hard work during the pregnancy (page 10). In addition, one mother did not use ANC services even though she stayed with her own mother (page 10). The selected quotes reveal that it may be too early to conclude that the expectations of mothers-in-law in regards to workload has had an impact on the decision to use or not use ANC services.

Now that we are highlighting that all mothers-in-law were illiterate, other factors such as perceptions of relationships, family finances and power, have greater salience. We cannot say on the basis of a qualitative study which factors are causative but only indicate respondents’ perceptions as reviewer below notes.

Since the purpose of qualitative research is to describe/explain/understand the phenomena, not to find causal factors related to ANC uptake, it may not be appropriate to discuss that mothers-in-law are an important factor affecting ANC uptake (page 19, 20). It should be discuss that ANC attendance is influenced by mothers-in-law.
We have changed the wording in the conclusion to reflect this valid point
5. The title is appropriate. However, the abstract does not provide a good argument for the significance of this study. Furthermore, the abstract does not make a clear connection between the background and the purpose of this study.

We have amended both the title and the abstract to reflect the new emphasis on mother-in-laws equivalence.

• Minor Essential Revisions
The author can be trusted to make these. For example, missing labels on figures, the wrong use of a term, spelling mistakes.
- The consistency of the word; check up/check-up

We have changed it to check-up throughout
- Some words loss and spelling mistake; eg. my in-laws(page 8 in the last paragraph): it should be “my mother in-law”; and afecting(page 4) should be affecting; if ANC (page 5) should be of ANC

These terms are now consistently used
• Discretionary Revisions These are recommendations for improvement which the author can choose to ignore. For example clarifications, data that would be useful but not essential.

This paper would be better of the author illustrate some more detail:
- At the end of the rational paragraph, please state clearly of the research objective

AUTHORS’ REPLY: This has been done see page 6.
- Please clearly state of the study setting: for example; where is the ANC clinic and sample place/hometown? This study did not tell us about the target population setting which is effect to the population context.

AUTHORS’ REPLY: This now been added see page 7
- Please describe about the content validity of semi-structure questionnaire.

AUTHORS’ REPLY: We have now described thid on page 7:
The questionnaire was used to ascertain socio-demographic information about both ANC service users and non-users (copy available from first author), reducing the length of the in-depth interview and guiding its content., As we planned a predominantly qualitative study with relatively low numbers of intervieweees it was envisaged that no statistical analysis would be conducted comparing any of the groups, hence construct validity of the instrument was a lesser concern.

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:
All of the above questions are no.
I declare that I have no competing interests.

Reviewer three
Reviewer's report
The authors tackle an understudied issue – the role of the mother-in-law – in decisions to seek ANC in Nepal. It is an important area of study, not just in Nepal, but other socio-cultural contexts where the mother-in-law’s status affords her considerable power over her daughter-in-law. Their approach – using qualitative methods – is an appropriate one – in order to uncover the meanings and processes around decisions to use ANC.

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
   - Major Compulsory Revision
   The question(s) are not clearly articulated in order that the reader can clearly assess whether (and how) they have been answered. The article hints at the research question(s) but falls short of clear and explicit articulation (p5) “none of the studies has examined in-depth the role of mothers-in-law in ANC, for example how and under what circumstances they affect the decision-making process around ANC?” – these hint at the research questions addressed in the article but are not set out unambiguously.
   **AUTHORS’ REPLY:** we have changed the text in the paragraph to make it flow more logically and the last two sentences now give the following research aims:

   ‘Therefore, our study set out to examine in detail the role of mothers-in-law in decision-making and uptake of ANC by their daughters-in-law, gaining insight into the circumstances that affect the decision-making process around ANC.’

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
   - Major Compulsory Revision
   Broadly, the methods are appropriate – a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews prefaced by a semi-structured questionnaire. Their justification and description are not well described, and would require revision for publication:
   - how was the sample size decided and justified?
   **AUTHORS’ REPLY:** This now been added see page 6-7
   - Some information on the geographic location of this research would be useful (beyond urban-rural in Nepal)
   **AUTHORS’ REPLY:** This now been added see pages 7
   - P.6 query category descriptions – should users versus non-users instead read as “ever-users versus never-users”? The two category groupings are distinct and need clarification. For example, a 2+ parity woman included in the study could have had ANC for child #1 and no ANC for child #2 – would she be defined as a non-user in this study?

   Two non-users were previous users because they went for ANC in a previous pregnancy and got into such a trouble that they never went back. See example on page 9 we have changed the text a little bit to illustrate this.
My in-laws and my husband scolded me. I thought it would be better not to go for check-ups than to hear criticism from them. I went for a check-up once in my previous pregnancy, I had to wait in the queue. They blamed me for going to see my friends for entertainment, leaving my household work undone (Non-user Woman1).

- It is unclear how (p.6) “education, age, ethnicity and religion of respondents were also considered while selecting the sample”, given a sample size of 30 women, divided into two groups for ANC non/use.

AUTHORS’ REPLY: Yes this was misleadingly worded as it appeared that we had deliberately selected for class differences. We selected the women for all the characteristics mentioned but MILs and husbands mainly for attendance and area of residence. This has been rewritten. See page 6-7.

- No information given on response/ refusal rate

AUTHOR’S REPLY: All the women approached agreed to be interviewed but one could not complete the interview due to interruptions from other family members. This has been added

- No information given on how the husbands and MILs were selected (not selected on the basis of the women who were selected – otherwise there would have been approx. 30 of each?)

AUTHORS’ REPLY: the women were purposively selected to include the characteristics listed in the text. The husbands and mothers-in-law were selected on the woman’s ANC usage (or lack thereof) and urban/rural residence. See page 7 due to resource constrains we decided beforehand that we could only interview ten of each group.

3. Are the data sound?

- Major Compulsory Revision

The authors do address the issue of language inasmuch as the first author is a native speaker of the language of the interviews. However, there is insufficient detail for a reader to determine the quality of the data (including their translation).

For example, was a sample of interviews translated by someone else for cross-checking? If not, then this should be highlighted as a limitation. Is there any assessment of the quality of the translation done by the author? For example, p.10 “…Well people in maternal home understand more…..”

AUTHORS’ REPLY: we have added details in text as well as extra reference in the Discussion (see page 25). We also added the statement: Although people’s spoken language does not always follow conventional grammatical rules, we have tried to convey the original meaning, which occasionally leads to quotes appearing ungrammatical.

p. 17 “…carrying her (keeping together) all the time…” – are these brackets the authors’, in which case the typography should reflect this clarification Table 1
AUTHORS’ REPLY: we have reworded it to reflect the woman’s meaning and explained it in the text.
- no explanation given for meanings in caste categories e.g.: Tamang versus Newar
- what does the variable “Number of children” refer to, and why is it relevant for this study? Number of pregnancies? Number of live births? The quality of these data as they are reported raises doubts for the reader, especially the inclusion of the unusual category “Lost child”. The other categories are hard to read, including “children up o 2”

AUTHORS’ REPLY: We have revised the table to reflect above criticisms. As religion is not discussed we have removed it from the table.
- what is the variable “Number of family”, and why is it relevant for the study?

AUTHORS’ REPLY: We have changed it to number of people in the household. This is important as it affects how much work a young woman has to do at home.
- no data are presented that link the socio-demographics of the other respondents – husbands and MIL to the women. This would appear to be a major oversight of the authors, given that comparison of dissonance between husband-wives or MILs-daughter-in-law – that would have been useful for this study to tease out

AUTHOR’S REPLY: This was not an issue examined in this paper

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition? The data are anonymised but no information available regarding data deposition (although copies of the research instruments are made available)

AUTHORS’ REPLY: the data are part of the first author’s PhD study.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

Major Compulsory Revision
- the authors do not identify the criteria for inclusion/exclusion of quotes drawn from their data in the article. There is heavy reliance on quotes in the results/analyses section of the paper, but the reader is not told why these quotes were selected in particular.

AUTHORS’ REPLY: We have explained on page 9 that the quotes illustrate the range of views and opinion within each theme.

- the paper would benefit from greater reflection (and critical comparison with the broader literature) of the themes that emerge and less reproduction of verbatim quotes

AUTHOR’S REPLY: We have added more reflection on other people’s findings in the discussion section but did not find it appropriate for the findings section
- throughout this article there is little sense of triangulating (even if this involves putting qualitative findings against quantitative data from elsewhere) the findings. For example, p. 20, “most MILs assume ANC requires lots of time waiting in a queue” – is there any evidence from elsewhere about waiting times at ANC clinics?

AUTHORS’ REPLY: In the discussion we have discussed our findings in relation to similar studies from other undeveloped countries
p.24 “At the policy level…..care in Nepal” – but the authors offer no insights as to how this might be achieved in terms of service delivery or intervention or programme or information-education-communication. Are there no comparable examples from other countries that might be demonstrated as useful exemplars?
AUTHORS’ REPLY: We have added a few sentences addressing this issue in the discussion, see last paragraph of strengths and limitations section on page 23.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
There is a separate limitations section in the paper. The paper would be improved if the approach to limitations were more reflective, for example, suggesting how these limitations might have impacted on the data, their analyses, and ultimately the conclusions.

AUTHORS’ REPLY: We have added this to the strengths and weaknesses section.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
Yes

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
Yes

9. Is the writing acceptable?
Yes - with minor essential revisions

p.3 “is estimated at 281 deaths per 100,000 ….which is one of the highest [WHAT?] in the world”

AUTHORS’ REPLY: we have added to the explanation on page 4.

p.4 “A number of studies..” This statement is very vague is referencing a systematic review. It would be preferable to cite the studies on which the evidence is based.

AUTHORS’ REPLY: this has been addressed see page 5.

p.4 “Limited resources and administrative capacity with strong underlying needs for health services create serious challenges to the Government of Nepal” The meaning of this sentence is unclear.

AUTHORS’ REPLY: we have reworded the sentence to make the meaning clear in the text.

p.5 “Women who felt friends and family to be supportive were twice as likely to attend ANC as other women” What country/ setting does this research refer to?

AUTHORS’ REPLY: this has been added in the text. it is in Jamaica

p.5 reconsider the definition of the term “patriarchal” or perhaps use a different term?

AUTHORS’ REPLY: this has been redefined

p.5 “mothers-in-law usually hold the top position in a hierarchical family network” this statement is contradictory given the preceding statement about patriarchy, and needs to be clarified or the nuances of these meanings drawn out for a Nepalese setting

AUTHORS’ REPLY: this has been clarified

p.5 “qualitative interviews are less formally structured [THAN WHAT?]…. 

AUTHORS’ REPLY: this section has been rewritten, see page 6 

p.6 “an understudied population” – it is unclear what this understudied population refers to – pregnant women? Mothers-in-law?

AUTHORS’ REPLY: which included mothers-in-law and husbands see page 6 

p.12 “Elevated? family” query “?”

AUTHORS’ REPLY: it has been corrected
p.12 Quote from ANC user’s MIL 4 - This quote is contradictory – it would have been useful to see some exploration of these contradictions

AUTHORS’ REPLY: This issue has been explored

p.16 “…took the, back to health….”

AUTHORS’ REPLY: it has been corrected

p.16 check grammar/sense of this para “One mother-in-law who had….living in a separate household”

AUTHORS’ REPLY: This has been reworded: ‘Mothers-in-law appeared to have less influence on ANC uptake if they did not live in the same household as their daughters-in-law, the woman herself and her husband appearing to make the decision then.’

Checking for grammar and punctuation needs to be done thoroughly throughout.

AUTHORS’ REPLY: This has been done.

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.