Reviewer’s report

Title: Mothers’ experience of their contact with their stillborn infant: An interpretative phenomenological analysis.

Version: 2 Date: 3 March 2014

Reviewer: Gill Thomson

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Overall this is a well written and interesting piece of research that will be of great interest to those who research stillbirth as well as wider maternity readership. The research question posed by the authors is well described (e.g. mothers experiences of contact with their stillborn infant), drawing on previous research undertaken in this area and making a clear rationale as to why this study was needed. The title and abstract conveys what has been found. The phenomenological approach adopted, e.g. IPA is appropriate for the research question and the methods are appropriate and generally well described in the paper. The discussion and conclusions are generally well balanced and supported by the data and some limitations have been stated. However, I do feel that additional information and further clarification of certain points is required prior to publication. These have been outlined as follows:

Major Compulsory Revisions

A. Methodology:

A.1. Theoretical basis: Further clarification as to the nature and purpose of phenomenology should be provided, e.g. it is concerned with uncovering the ‘essence’ of a phenomenon, rather than just the subjective ‘lived experiences’. The sentence ‘furthermore, research is recognised as a dynamic process’ (p.6) requires further explanation as to what this means - dynamic in terms of what? As phenomenology appreciates and recognises the role of the ‘interpreter’ within the data collection and interpretive process – some reflective details as to who the researchers were/backgrounds would be beneficial for readers.

A.2. Study design and participants: Further/full details of the ‘larger study’ should be provided in this section (rather than briefly mentioned within the sample characteristics). Were there any exclusion or inclusion criteria for the study, e.g. over 18 years, that mothers had spent time with their still born infant, etc? How many women were approached in total? Details of data collection, e.g. questions posed during the interviews should be detailed within the ‘data collection section’.
A.3. Data collection and analysis: How many researchers were involved in undertaking interviews? How long were the interviews? Where did the interviews take place (which this becomes apparent later on in the paper – it should be clear within this section)? How many researchers were involved in the analysis process (e.g. p. 7 refers to transcripts being repeatedly read and listened to by the researchers?).

B. Results:
B.1. Sample characteristics: Were there no demographics recorded for the women, e.g. age, ethnicity, marital status, etc? Were the women recruited from different trusts – how many?

B.2. It is not clear why all subordinate themes are not discussed in the results section, particularly when using a phenomenological approach and fact that the table repeats a number of the quotes already detailed within the main body of the paper. All information should be contained within the results section - this could involve a couple of introductory sentences at the start of each superordinate theme to highlight all the subordinate issues that emerged in relation to that particular theme, followed by further insights into each of these issues and corresponding quotes.

B.3. Identifiers, e.g. pseudonym or interview code needs to be included against each quote so it is clear that these issues emerged across the data set.

B.4. Whilst most of the superordinate theme titles ‘make sense’ – the theme entitled ‘process’ is not clear. Further explanation as to what is referred to as ‘process’ in line with the subordinate issues of ‘time’ and ‘shared experience’ should be included.

B.5. P. 13 – last sentence ‘….expressed further regrets about the decision they took to spend time with their stillborn baby’ – does not reflect the proceeding quote (which reflects how they wish they had held their baby – rather than the decision to spend time with their infant?).

C. Discussion
C.1. The first paragraph should provide a summary of the key findings - as it reads at present it feels a bit disjointed (e.g. the fact that mothers felt proud/and benefits of identifying family traits were not the only new insights that this study generated)?

C.2. The identified strength of participants being able to be ‘open and honest’ about their experiences should be re-considered – how can we as researchers actually ensure that this occurred?

Minor Essential Revisions
1. Further limitations (e.g. sample size, retrospective accounts, demographics of included participants, role of researchers) as well as strengths (e.g. fact that a number of the team were involved in the interpretive process thereby enhancing
the authenticity of the accounts generated) could also be considered?

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**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’