Reviewer's report

Title: A qualitative study exploring women's beliefs about physical activity after stillbirth

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Reviewer: Kelly Evenson

Reviewer's report:

The authors have thoughtfully collected and analyzed qualitative data on physical activity and stillbirth. This is an important and extremely under studied topic and I enjoyed reading the paper. I hope my comments might assist the authors in their work.

Specific Comments:

Abstract
Please provide the time period from stillbirth to interview (“in the past year” is quite a big range).

Results section of the abstract needs some revision, as it is unclear what the findings are as presented. Also suggest dropping the age information in the first sentence, since the range is given in the methods section.

Conclusion section of the abstract: The findings are difficult to follow from the intro and results of the abstract. Suggest some revision to better connect the abstract together.
- Sentence 1: difficult to understand within the abstract, because data on healthy women was not reported.
- Sentence 2 should be revised to note that it may only reflect women in the study. Also, this finding does not come from results presented in the abstract. The abstract conclusions differ some from the paper’s conclusions.

Introduction
Paragraph 2: References #11 and 12 identify two single studies. It might be better to make broader statements from review papers on pregnancy and postpartum depression and physical activity, rather than singling out two studies.

Paragraph 3: “recently there has been an increase” – but no evidence is given. Is it important in the introduction to describe the findings from women who had a live birth, in order to contrast against the findings you have?

It may also be helpful to provide some information from the health care provider’s perspective to lead into the inquiry about them. Do women see their physician for a 6 week postpartum check-up? Are there guidelines on activities following stillbirth for physicians to follow?
Methods

How did the health belief model guide the questions?

How was physical activity defined for the interviews? I wonder if this explanatory information would be helpful to add to Table 1?

Did the authors collect how active women were prior to, during, and after their pregnancy? (it is mentioned in the limitations section only?) If so, could this be added. If not, it may be a discussion point to bring up. I wonder if findings might differ in terms of views about physical activity based on their own behaviors.

Results

First paragraph: “an additional 40 women” – what does this mean? The figure seems to indicate that 40/41 were contacted. What happened to the one person?

Please provide time from stillbirth to interview (mean, range).

Were differences identified between those who had given birth earlier compared to later? I just wonder if recall might differ depending on time since the stillbirth.

Tables and Figures

Can the authors revise the document such that the tables are submitted as part of the paper and not supplementary?

Figure 1: Why were so many women ineligible? I think a figure is probably not needed, but more explanation could be provided in the text.

Table 2: Should “demographics” be “sociodemographics”? Suggest putting age in the text and simplifying the table to “n (%)”. Also suggest removing many rows with zero, as this information is not needed.

The still birth definition provided was >=20 weeks. Should the category “18-22” actually be “20-22” in table 2?

Table 3: Not sure it is a very useful addition to the paper as it stands, although I can understand how it might have been useful to the authors in developing the major themes. If the authors would like to retain it, I suggest dropping column 3, and expanding on column 1. Currently, the subcategories are too cryptic for readers to understand their meaning. More text could be provided to expand what was identified. Moreover, the rows provided in the table could match against the textual themes. Right now there is some mismatch. (For example, the heading “emotional symptoms and lack of motivation” is combined in the text, but separated in the table). Another idea is to move some of the quotes to the table, and reduce the length of the results section.

Discussion

Do the authors contrast their findings to qualitative studies of postpartum women with a live birth?
Minor Comment
I suggest not abbreviating physical activity in the text or tables.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests