Reviewer's report

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

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Reviewer: Emily Mailey

Reviewer's report:

This study used interviews to explore women’s beliefs about physical activity after stillbirth. This is an understudied population for whom physical activity could have significant positive effects on physical and mental health; thus, this paper represents an important and novel contribution to the existing literature. The manuscript highlights the potential for physical activity to be used in conjunction with existing treatment approaches to help women cope with the grief associated with their loss, but also demonstrates that recommending physical activity is not currently part of the standard of care. Thus, this study fills a gap in our current understanding of this population and offers future directions for researchers and practitioners. In particular, the discussion section provides some excellent practical recommendations for both women who have experienced a stillbirth and the practitioners who interact with them following their loss. There are, however, a number of revisions that would further strengthen the manuscript.

Major Compulsory Revisions:

1. The authors differentiate between women who were/weren’t meeting physical activity recommendations at the time of the interview throughout the manuscript. How was current PA assessed and what was the distribution of participants who were/weren’t meeting recommendations? This information could be provided in Table 2 or in the text to provide readers a more descriptive framework for interpreting the results.

Minor Essential Revisions:

2. Introduction, paragraph 3, sentence 2 – provide references to recent research examining beliefs about PA in pregnant and postpartum women.

3. Figure 1 – For what reasons were participants ineligible?

Discretionary Revisions:

4. The introduction, though brief, provides a good rationale for the proposed study. I would like to see the second paragraph expanded a bit, however. Are there any longitudinal or experimental studies that have shown PA reduces depressive symptoms among postpartum women? Also, I was curious about the cross-sectional study referenced (12). The description suggests mental health was measured in infants as well as mothers – was this the case?
5. Guilt is identified as one of the barriers reported by several women. The discussion section indicates some women reported feeling guilty about their actual loss, but the quotes provided in the results section do not reflect this theme. Although the quotes use the word “guilt,” their messages are more consistent with the previous theme (Lack of Motivation). The second quote in particular suggests the guilt was not so much a barrier, but an outcome related to her lack of exercise. Perhaps these quotes could be subsumed under the previous theme, or different quotes that are more consistent with guilt as a barrier could be selected.

6. Discussion, paragraphs 3-4 – There are several references to the importance of ‘private’ places to be active for this population, and cardiac rehab type classes are mentioned as an example. The authors might also consider discussing home-based exercise as a viable option for women who report barriers related to being active outside or in public places.

7. Discussion section, limitations - Given that this was a qualitative study and accurately assessing PA levels was not a primary goal of the study, the lack of an objective measure of PA does not strike me as a limitation.

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

**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.