Reviewer’s report

Title: Association of various reproductive rights, domestic violence and marital rape with depression among Pakistani women.

Version: 4 Date: 21 August 2009

Reviewer: Madelyn Hsiao-Rei Hicks

Reviewer’s report:

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. I am very pleased to find this paper substantially improved, as it offers significant new findings on reproductive rights, domestic abuse and depression in Pakistani women, and I think that the findings deserve to be published. However, there remain a few mandatory revisions if the authors wish to make this paper publishable, in my opinion. Several of these mandatory revisions are ones that I requested in my first review, and I strongly suggest that they be addressed before another version is sent to me.

2. First, although the writing is much improved, I believe that the paper still cannot be published yet due to numerous grammatical errors. These errors are too many to address individually in this review and they interfere with understanding the paper.
   • It must be a requirement that the authors have their paper carefully edited by someone with fully adequate English writing skills. A native speaker of English might be necessary.
   • Particularly since one of the authors is based in Canada, I have to assume that it is possible to ask a native English speaker to edit this paper for language.

3. Background, page 3, last paragraph:
   • The citation for this study is missing. It needs to be included. Also, it should not be a massive report like citation 15. Instead, any finding from a specific study should be referenced to that specific study.

4. Background, page 4, first paragraph: Citation 15 is incorrectly used here. The citation used here needs to be the specific study done in rural Egypt that the authors describe. Although the ‘State of the World Population’ report cited in 15 might list this study, it is not the study itself. Please correct any similar mistakes in citations if they exist.

5. Methods, page 5: These compulsory additions might fit well at the end of the 2nd paragraph:
   • The authors still have not written in their paper’s Methods the source of their items used to measure reproductive rights – the main factors they are studying. They must specify in their Methods whether they developed their reproductive
rights items themselves, based on local knowledge for example, or whether other studies or questionnaires were used in part as the basis for their items. If they used parts or all of items from another study, they need to cite that study. If they used a report of some kind to think up their own items, they need to say so and cite that report.

• RE marital rape: Marital rape is a major item in their study, but how was it asked? Here in Methods, they still need to write out the wording of their marital rape question. Although it is very helpful that they define ‘marital rape’ for readers in the Introduction (“any unwanted intercourse or penetration (vaginal, anal or oral) obtained by force, threat of force, or when the wife is unable to consent”), is that what they asked their subjects? There is room to include this item’s wording in their paper and it needs to be included.

• RE the tool used to measure verbal, emotional and physical abuse by husbands and in-laws: Again, the source of these items must be addressed at this point in the Methods, although I take your point that the specific wording of these particular items is not needed, since you can provide their source.

• I suggest that you move what you currently have in your Discussion on the domestic violence items (page 11) and include it here instead, to read, “The three items used to measure verbal, emotional and physical abuse each had three possible responses that measured frequency (sometimes, often and never). These domestic violence items were used in the WHO multicountry study on women’s health and domestic violence [9], but have not been validated in Pakistan. We did not use validated tools to measure domestic violence or reproductive rights because no such tools had been validated in Pakistan, and validation was not within the scope of our study.”

• In your Discussion, you will still need to include your sentence on limitations from the lack of validation, as you have in the Discussion already, but the part I describe above belongs to your study's Methods.

6. Discussion, page 9, first paragraph: In the first sentence, you describe a study in Karachi and give citation 5. However, citation 5 is NOT a study in Karachi, but in Turkey. Also, the first author’s name is misspelled. You must cite the correct study here. Also check that you cite Inandi [5] correctly elsewhere in your paper.

7. Discussion, page 9, first paragraph: Citation 15 turns up again here. As before, and please check elsewhere in your paper, specific studies need to be cited instead of one report that lists different studies (unless 15 actually has a whole chapter reviewing a body of studies that make your point )

8. Discussion, page 11, 1st paragraph, 2nd sentence: This sentence still needs to be changed to reflect the fact that persons (especially those who are disadvantaged) might not receive or seek treatment for depression because of external barriers – not just because of their own beliefs.

• So I suggest that you change this sentence to something like: “This reflects that women in our study population may be unaware of their depression, that they
may consider their depression inappropriate to mention to a physician, or that they may experience social, cultural or economic barriers to accessing treatment for depression.”

9. Discussion, page 11, 2nd paragraph, 1st sentence: First, as a grammatical point, the sentence could be split by a full stop after “limitations.” The compulsory revision is that you must acknowledge that your case control study cannot establish a temporal or a causal relationship. You use the phrase “difficult to” elsewhere, but again, it actually “cannot”. I suggest that you write, “For example, it was not possible to establish a temporal or causal direction in our case control study; as we did not determine whether depression preceded or followed the associated factors.”

10. Conclusion, page 11, first sentence: Your first sentence needs to be changed to state your actual findings, not what is implied by your findings (which you describe very well later in your paragraph). So for your first sentence, you might write something like: “Our study found significant associations in Pakistani women between depression and lack of some basic reproductive rights, as manifested by: being under 18 years of age at marriage; decisions for marriage being determined by parents; and marital rape. Also significantly associated with depression were abuse by in-laws, less time spent daily with her husband, and lower frequency of intercourse.”

11. Additional point on a citation: As I suggested before, I think that it is important to mention another study that found a very high rate of marital rape reported by Pakistani men towards their wives, to the extent that it was “a norm”: Masood Ali Shaikh. 2000. Domestic violence against women – perspective from Pakistan. J Pak Med Assoc, 50 (9): 312-314.
   • If you have reason to think that this study is invalid, then of course, I agree with not citing it. But otherwise, it seems so directly related to your findings that it would be odd not to recognize it in your discussion. It would also corroborate your findings of a high prevalence of marital rape reported by women. As you might discuss, women might particularly under-report marital rape, due to shame or stigma to the woman. Masood Ali Shaikh's finding that men consider it a 'norm', with high husband-reported prevalence, suggests that there no shame or stigma attributed to the husband, which supports your assumption of gender-inequality. It also suggests some degree of under-reporting of marital rape by the wives in your study.

Minor Essential Revisions

1. Abstract, Background: The background needs to be a little more succinct. The first sentence is good. But the 2nd and 3rd sentences are repetitive. I suggest that you replace the 2nd and 3rd sentences with one sentence, for example, “Gender inequality can contribute to women’s risk for depression.”
   • As a Discretionary Revision, you might drop the last sentence of your Background. It detracts, I think, from the focus of your study.
2. Abstract, Results: You mention your finding of domestic abuse prevalence in your Abstract Conclusion, so you need to provide the result here. For example, provide the sentence from your Results text on the prevalence of spouse and of in-law abuse at the end of your Abstract Results: “52% of women had been physically, verbally or emotionally abused by spouses and 34% by in-laws.”

3. Abstract Conclusion: Make the first phrase, which is currently “Our study found a high prevalence of domestic abuse...” into one short sentence. Then place that sentence after your main finding, which is: “Depression in married women in Pakistan was associated with low age at marriage, lack of autonomy in marriage decisions, marital rape, and domestic abuse by in-laws.” Your main finding is important to highlight in your first sentence.

4. Abstract Conclusion: The sentence that begins, “Efforts should be directed...”, should end with the words, “...in Pakistan.”

5. Methods, page 5, 4th paragraph: Your sentence about providing doctors with the DSM-IV criteria is too imprecise. I suggest you replace it with something like, “Physicians were also given the list of DSM-IV depression criteria by the research team, for convenient reference.”

6. Methods, page 6, 2nd paragraph: I have not seen the term “any co-morbids” before. Please replace with the more common term, “...any co-morbid chronic medical illnesses...”

7. Results, page 7, 2nd paragraph: Here you write that subjects were “15-48 years”, but everywhere else you write “15-49 years”. Please correct or clarify.
   • Also, I notice that the first ‘paragraph’ is only two short sentences long, and that you have many very short paragraphs. This is not good style. Please group your sentences into more cohesive paragraphs, simply by pulling some of them together.

8. Results, page 8, last sentence: The word “biological” seems unnecessary here. Suggest you remove it and just write, “…no interaction...”

9. Discussion, page 9, 3rd paragraph: I find the grammar to be a big problem in this paragraph particularly, and also there is the problem I stated earlier about the “temporal relationship” discussion. The paragraph needs to be written more clearly. For example:
   • “Studies in the past have shown that marital rape is associated with various gynaecological diseases, which may lead to lower frequency of sexual activity [7-9]; factors found to be associated with depression in our study. It is not possible for us to establish a temporal relationship or causal direction between low sexual activity and depression, because our study was not designed to examine this question, and depression itself leads to decreased sexual desire [25]. Other studies have shown similar associations. A study of postnatal women in Taiwan and the UK found an association between postnatal depression and an unsatisfactory sex life [30]. A retrospective study of low-income suburban women
in Texas showed an association between depression and not having had sexual intercourse in the previous 3 months [31]. Further studies are required to understand this association.”

• Please note, as I have in this suggested version, that the citation of study 31 should include UK women, and that they did not study a temporal or causal direction between depression and unsatisfactory sex life, as they clarify in their abstract’s conclusion.

10. Discussion, page 11, last sentence: You should note that future studies should include probability sampling (since you used convenience sampling). I don’t think that multi-centre studies are necessary. You could write: “Larger, community-based studies that use probability sampling of subjects are required to substantiate our findings.”

Discretionary Revisions

1. Abstract, Aim: It would be clearer to write, “To determine the association of depression with lack of various reproductive rights and domestic violence among married women in Karachi, Pakistan.”

2. Abstract Conclusion: The last phrase of the last sentence that reads, “...especially in couples where...” should be deleted. It does not add to what you say and detracts from the first part of the sentence. Ideally, the sentence would stop after “marital counselling”.

3. Background, page 4, last paragraph: Your aim in the last sentence of your Background would be clearer if you wrote it this way: “This study aimed to identify the association of depression in married women in Pakistan with lack of various reproductive rights and other markers of gender inequality, like domestic violence, and to identify measures that may have clinical and policy implications for decreasing the burden of disease.”

4. Methods, page 4, 2nd paragraph: It would be better to move this up to continue the first paragraph, and to alert the reader from the beginning that you are writing about your sample size calculation. For example, you could write, “Our sample size calculation was based on findings from studies that physical abuse by a husband is a risk factor for depression [6, 12], and that 50% of married women in Pakistan have been physically abused by spouses [21].”

5. Results, page 7, 4th and 5th paragraphs talking about Table 1 and Table 2 findings:

• I suggest that at the end of these paragraphs, you list the factors that showed strongest statistically significant associations with depression. It seems that the paper is not too long to include this, and it is interesting to point out to what you found at this level of analysis.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests
Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

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