Reviewer’s report

Title: Knowledge, perceptions and myths regarding infertility and its treatment among adults visiting tertiary care hospitals in Pakistan

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Reviewer: Mary McNaughton-Cassill

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Major Compulsory Revisions

This manuscript explores how much Pakistani Hospital patients know about Infertility, and possible treatments for this condition. Given the high rates of infertility found in Pakistan, understanding people’s misperception about this disorder would be helpful for health care providers interested in helping patients to identify and seek help for their infertility problems. Unfortunately, however, the manuscript, as it stands now, has a number of serious problems.

1) Introduction:

a) The initial rationale for the study is vague. It would help if the authors provided more background information about how the societal norms and religious beliefs in their community specifically influence attitudes about infertility, instead of simply mentioning that there is a relationship.

b) Many of the sentences are awkward, or indirect. For example, “Lack of knowledge about the success rates and chances to become parents has also been shown to influence treatment seeking behavior” would read better if it were changed to read: People are more likely to seek Infertility treatment if they accurately understand the procedures and their success rates.

2) Methods:

a) The methods section is not detailed enough. What were the patients in the hospital for? How were they recruited for the study? Were any of them having infertility issues themselves? It might also have helped to ascertain whether they already had children or grandchildren, since much is made of the stress of infertility, and the role of in-laws in creating pressure to have children.

b) The sample size is adequate, and the actual participation rate is good. The section on the participant’s education levels is unclear (although the table helps) and no information is provided about religion, although that is one of the premises of the study.

c) Since the questionnaire was created by the researchers, they need to provide some examples of the questions, or an appendix with all of the items. Simply discussing the items does not standardize them, although presumably they do
still reflect the people in the sample’s views of infertility. It might also help to
define how the authors identified the “prevailing myths” about infertility in their
culture that they mention.

d) In the ethical considerations section they might mention the options patients
had for not participating, and whether the data was collected and stored
anonymously.

3) Results:

a) The results sections is poorly organized and difficult to follow. Simply reporting
the percent of participants who got items correct is not as informative as it could
be since the survey was newly created, and there are no norms.

b) Furthermore, the analyses did not take full advantage of the data. It would be
interesting for example, to compare the responses of males and females to the
knowledge and attitude questions and to do something similar on the basis of
education, and/or religion if such data is available. Analyses including t-tests,
Anovas, and Multiple Regressions would allow for such comparisons.

c) Although the phrase “test-tube” babies may be common in popular literature it
is not typically a term used in the medical/psychological literature. If in fact it is a
good translation into English of a term in popular use in Pakistan, that should be
explained in the manuscript.

4) Discussion:

a) The description suffers from many of the same problems as the introduction. It
is disjointed, the sentences are awkward and much of the information is not
directly linked to the findings of this particular study, or is simply repeated from
the introduction. Some of the information might also be of more help to the
reader if it were presented in the introduction of the paper (the sections on the
definition of infertility, the previous studies on knowledge of infertility in other
countries, and the issue of infertility and marital dissonance in Pakistan).

b) One of the more interesting findings of the study, the fact that some people are
turning to alternative treatments for infertility, should be discussed more fully in
the discussion. It is not clear whether the data indicated that they are doing this
in place of medical treatment, or along with it, but this might be an interesting
distinction to discuss.

c) Similarly, the finding that in vitro fertilization was far less acceptable to many
participants than taking medications should discussed in greater detail. How
does the Islamic religion influence these beliefs? Are such assumptions even
amenable to change in devout individuals? Is the use of alternative treatments
harmful because of the treatments themselves, or because they interfere with
people’s seeking medical advice?

d) The limitations section is confusing. What is meant by the phrase failing to
“explore the domain of practices”?
5) Conclusions:

a) If in fact lack of accurate knowledge about infertility interferes with seeking medical treatment as this study suggests, then how might these problems be addressed? There is a huge literature on the effective promotion of health behaviors. Simply informing people does not necessarily change behavior. Theories such as Rosenstock’s Health Beliefs Model might offer a structure for thinking about attitude and behavioral change. The suggestions given for educating people through electronic and print media may not be relevant for the less educated individuals in the sample. If religion plays a strong role in people’s beliefs about infertility than even the provision of information about infertility may need to be addressed in the context of people’s religious traditions, and perhaps by working through their religious leaders.

b) In conclusion, although this paper addresses an important issue, the manuscript as it stands now does not provide a clear justification for the study, adequate analyses of the data set, or a comprehensive discussion of the results. Therefore, I do not recommend publication of this manuscript.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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.