Reviewer's report

**Title:** The experiences of women of reproductive age regarding health-promoting behaviours: A qualitative study

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 19 December 2011

**Reviewer:** Michelle McCarron

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This study provides an interesting examination of the health behaviours of women of reproductive age in Tehran. Using in-depth, semi-structured interviews, the authors obtained extensive information from 15 women about nine distinct types of health-promoting behaviours such as eating patterns, spirituality, social interactions, and balancing restfulness and activity. The information presented in Tables 2 and 3 were particularly helpful in illuminating how the authors arrived at their findings.

**Major Compulsory Revisions:**

1. Although this research is billed as a study of women’s health-promoting behaviours, there does not appear to have been a focus on women’s health, per se. Were any aspects of this study tailored to address health issues and practices that are specific to women? Why were only women of reproductive age included? It does not appear that any of the interview questions had to do with reproductive health, so this seems unnecessarily exclusionary. The authors should clarify why it was important to interview women specifically about health-promoting behaviours, and why the focus was on women of reproductive age.

2. I was unconvinced by several of the conclusions drawn in the Discussion section. As the authors note in the final paragraph of this section (p. 23): “Similar to other qualitative studies, the findings of the present study has [sic] a low potentiality for generalizability, especially because it was performed on a limited number of women of reproductive age in Tehran; as a result, the results should be cautiously generalized to other women.” Despite this acknowledged limitation (which is common to all qualitative studies of this nature), throughout the Discussion section, the authors have generalized both their own findings and those from other qualitative studies in order to make sweeping cultural comparisons. Differences in findings could just as easily be attributable to different sets of interview questions being asked within each of the referenced studies (e.g., the authors of the present may have asked questions pertaining to spiritual health whereas the authors of another study might not have). Perhaps the authors could be more transparent as to the types of interview questions they asked in this study versus the types of questions asked in the studies held up for comparison (assuming they are able to obtain the interview protocols from the other researchers). Nevertheless, as it stands, I found the claims that are based
on comparisons to other qualitative studies to be unsubstantiated.

Minor Essential Revisions:

1. Abstract (Methods), line 2 AND Methods, page 5, last line: “individual in-depth and semi-structured interviews” This should be rephrased as “individual in-depth, semi-structured interviews” so as not to make it appear as though these are two different types of interview methods.

2. Key words: “experience” is too vague

3. Background, page 4, para. 2: “Considering women’s health as a priority in the country will help to achieve many goals of the third millennium development goals.” This sentence was quite vague. What goals are the authors referring to?

4. page 6, first line: Change “open questions” to “open-ended questions”

5. page 6, line 9: By “grimace,” do the authors perhaps mean “facial cues” or “facial expression”?

6. page 11, Stress Management, line 2: Please change “subjects’” to “participants’”

7. page 26, reference 15: “Three approach” should be “Three approaches”

8. Problems with grammar and phrasing were too extensive to enumerate. The manuscript should be edited for clarity.

Discretionary Revisions:

1. It would be helpful to include a bit more information (e.g., social, economic) about Tehran and/or Iran more generally, in order to provide some additional context for the discussion of women’s health.

2. Did participants consent to the use of verbatim quotes in publications stemming from this research? Were participants given the opportunity to review their own interview transcripts? These issues could be addressed in the Methods section.

3. Were the interviews conducted in English? If not, who translated the text (e.g., one of the study authors, a reputable transcription service) and how did the authors ensure that the translations were accurate?

4. I would like to see more information included about the content analysis method used to analyze the data. Did you use a primarily deductive or inductive approach to constructing your codes, sub-categories, categories, main categories, and overarching theme?

5. I was curious as to how the demographic information presented in Table 1 compares with the demographic breakdown for women in Tehran in general (or even in Iran, more broadly). For example, are highly educated women
over-represented in this sample? It would be helpful to include some information about the demographic breakdown for women in this area so that readers can draw their own conclusions as to how representative they feel that the study sample is of the population of women in Tehran and/or Iran in general.

**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:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.