Reviewer's report

Title: Socio-demographic factors and processes associated with stages of change for smoking cessation in pregnant versus non-pregnant women.

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Reviewer: Ross Barnett

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Much has been written on smoking in the last few years and, given my interest in the former, I welcomed the opportunity to review this article on smoking among pregnant and non-pregnant women. However, while I found the article interesting I’m not sure what contribution it has made to our knowledge of women’s smoking. My particular criticisms are:

1. The study fails to adequately situate the work in the wider context of women’s smoking and smoking among pregnant women in particular. I would have preferred to have seen a brief review of the literature on pregnant and non-pregnant smokers and what particular gap in the research this study attempts to fill.

2. I would also have liked to have seen some discussion of the importance of individual versus environmental causes of smoking and the failure of much smoking cessation policy to address the latter. The abstract mentions the importance of “social contextual factors”, but these are not really discussed in the conclusion. Much smoking cessation policy has failed precisely because it has tended to focus on individual behaviour change and less on the critical environmental factors which also affect perceptions of risk. Even pregnant women may continue to smoke in some social environments if the perceived risks of doing so are less than the other risks they may experience in their day to day lives.

3. The study design also needs further elaboration:

a. I would have liked to have seen more information on the social composition of the two samples and how they were chosen. Telling me that “about 85%” of the women in both groups had a high school education is not that helpful.

b. The familiar TTM is introduced but again telling me that the questionnaire included both experiential and behavioural process as components of the stage of change model would have been more useful had the design been more clearly related to a theoretical framework or some stated hypotheses.

c. Similarly throughout the paper too many issues are just “dropped in” without adequate explanation eg like the ‘three types of situations’ and ‘precocious stages’ (p. 7). The Situational Temptation Measure should have been discussed in more detail in the methods section and again should have been more clearly...
related to particular study objectives.

4. The Discussion section provides a useful summary of the findings but it fails to:

a. Acknowledge the limitations of the study

b. Demonstrate what contribution the study has made to the wider literature eg I would have liked to have seen some discussion of why educational factors were only important among pregnant smokers, whereas the wider literature on smoking inequality would suggest that socio-economic status, however measured, is a very good predictor of smoking cessation for both women and men.

5. In sum I found this to be a disappointing paper which lacks a clear message both in a theoretical and policy sense. In its present form I would not recommend its publication. I would have also appreciated that the authors names not been included on the manuscript.