Reviewer's report

Title: Quality of life, coping strategies and support in infertility: Women's needs and experiences with Traditional Chinese Medicine in Australia: a mixed methods approach

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Reviewer: Viju Thomas

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Perhaps the author would consider altering the title. The term "infertility" is indeed used very broadly, as mentioned by the author, however, male factor infertility was excluded. Furthermore, the "population" actually consists of women with "poor obstetric history" and pregnancy failure" in addition to primary and secondary infertility.

The population consists of a very heterogeneous group of women, with regard to etiology. In my opinion, there is significant selection bias and the "golden thread" among all subjects is that they all attended TCM treatment.

This study therefore reflects patients who have gone and sought help from TCM healers. For purposes of the qualitative study undertaken, this is fine, however, this is a "mixed study," as stated by the author and this population is too selective to come to the conclusions at which they have reached regarding the quality of life(QOL) and COPE questionnaires.

Conditions such as recurrent pregnancy losses and stillbirths have various other etiologies, not necessarily linked to those of infertility. The author has not commented on what types of medical investigations and management had been offered to these women, prior to being included in the study. In fact, the author states that only two thirds of all subjects sought help while the other one third went directly to TCM centers.

As the authors calculated the means for the QOL data, I assume that the data was normally distributed and parametric tests were done. The means of 18 women with primary infertility, in this study, were compared to 275 with women, IN GERMANY (from another non-related study?), for an outcome. Are these groups comparable? Are they similar? What tests were done in each group? What are their demographics? How many cycles did each women undergo? This data is not available. In my viewpoint 3 things are questionable:

1. Were 18 women adequate to do this comparison?
2. Was a sample size/power calculation done to arrive at this number? It appears to me that sample size was calculated based on "thematic saturation" for the qualitative aspect, rather than sample size calculation. This approach is only adequate for the qualitative part of this "mixed methods" study.
3. Were the groups comparable?

I am also not sure about the ethnicity of this population. How many of them have Chinese/asian ancestry? The authors comment that all subjects were born in Australia, but I would think that families with Chinese ancestry have a higher chance of being influenced positively by TCM. This brings an element of selection bias.

The information retrieved from the qualitative work is informative and lends a deep perspective to women's feelings and thoughts and will provide benefit to health practitioners and patients alike.

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

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

**Declaration of competing interests:**

No conflict of interest.