Reviewer’s report

Title: Gender: Shaping Women's Personality, Lives and Health in Pakistan

Version: 2  Date: 9 November 2013

Reviewer: Atif Rahman

Reviewer’s report:

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The findings, and the conclusions derived, need to be presented in a more balanced manner. For example, the study was conducted on groups of women from a squatter settlement in Karachi – Pakistan’s largest city. This group is not representative of the ethnic, socioeconomic or rural/urban mix of population in Pakistan, yet the findings are presented as though these apply to all Pakistani women.

2. The methodology needs to be described in more detail. How were the participants selected? What were there demographic characteristics? How were the field guides constructed so as to retain objectivity and reduce bias? Could the field guides/questions/probes be included as appendices to the paper? How was the data collected, transcribed and analysed? Has the ‘body mapping exercise’ been used before? It would be much more informative if small case studies of how women responded to the questions and probes could be presented to illustrate the process.

3. What measures did the researchers take to reduce interviewer bias and imposing their own views on this apparently disempowered group of women? Our own experience of conducting research in such groups in Pakistan is that there is often strong acquiescence in response, especially if leading questions are asked. The group dynamics is also often such that dominant voices tend to impose their views on the rest of the group. These issues should be described in limitations so that the conclusions are more balanced.

4. The results are not adequately presented. It would be useful to have some idea of the frequency of responses, leading to development of themes, supported by more actual quotes from participants. It is unclear how the themes described were drawn out. As the paper focuses on women’s perception, it would be useful to have verbatim quotes.

5. The discussion (and introduction) should include a slightly more in-depth analysis informed by anthropological, economic, social and religious factors shaping society. For example, the discussion begins with the statement, “The study informs that Pakistani society idealizes a ‘Model Woman’ based on the principles that reproduction is a woman’s only responsibility, and the family honour is dependent upon her sexual chastity”. This is over-generalisation of the data – and the statements should be qualified by a description of this particular population, and factors that may led to these perceptions. There should be a
section on limitations of the study, such as those described in 3 above.

Minor Essential Revisions:
The abstract should also be rewritten in light of the above comments.

Abstract; The term 'constructed' is better than 'fabricated'.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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’