Reviewer's report

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

Version: 3 Date: 18 February 2014

Reviewer: Kiran Pienaar

Reviewer's report:

This is an important and interesting qualitative study of gender norms in a geographical region (Pakistan) that is under-represented in the feminist and sociological literature. The findings concerning the specific manifestations of gender inequity in Pakistan are troubling, if not altogether surprising. The paper makes some practical recommendations for redressing these pervasive gender inequities.

Major compulsory revisions

1. Methodology: The existing description of the discussion guide does not give much sense of the kinds of questions asked: “A discussion guide was developed stating main issues around Pakistani women as determined in the current literature and reports”. I agree with the suggestion made by one of the reviewers to include the discussion guide as an appendix. Alternatively, the authors could provide a gloss of the questions in the body text, i.e. specify the kinds of topics raised in discussion as "main issues" facing Pakistani women. I think this would be helpful in contextualising the analysis as well as providing valuable information on the methodological approach taken.

2. On p. 11, the authors observe: “Women, despite knowledge and desire for birth spacing, fail to use contraceptives as husbands, who make fertility decision, prefer having children”. This phrasing seems to attribute responsibility for contraception (and failure to practise it) to women. I would suggest rephrasing this to acknowledge that responsibility for contraception is distributed and that it isn’t necessarily that women "fail" to use contraceptives but rather, that women’s agency and ability to enforce contraceptive use is very limited because of the (unilateral?) power that their male partners/husbands exercise in fertility decisions. The authors might like to link this to their next point on abortion as a method for contraception: in cases of pregnancy with a female foetus, a woman’s reproductive rights are often denied because her husband will coerce her to terminate the pregnancy.

3. The paper paints a grim picture of the life circumstances of Pakistani women. This may well be an accurate portrayal but I wondered whether there were any accounts in the data of women resisting oppressive practices? What kind of agency (however limited) do women exercise in the situations described in the paper? Are there ways in which they challenge patriarchal privilege and/or seek to enforce, for example, their reproductive rights? Acknowledging such instances of resistance (or mentioning briefly why limited opportunities exist for resistance)
would make the analysis more nuanced.

4. Given that, as the authors note in the discussion and conclusion, the findings of the paper are consistent with those of previous studies in Pakistan, it would be helpful if the authors elucidated the contribution to knowledge that the paper makes. This could be in the form of a brief but persuasive statement, perhaps foregrounded in the abstract, the introduction and the conclusion.

5. Very brief mention is made of figures 1 and 2 in the body of the text and it wasn’t clear to me how they advance the argument. It would be helpful to include a brief statement explaining the figures as I don’t think they are self-evident. It was also not clear whether the authors devised these figures. If they did, then I think this should be stated as it makes a contribution to knowledge. It would also be useful to reference the figures more consistently throughout the paper, e.g. when the ‘Model’ is first referred to in the discussion section.

Minor essential revisions
1. The paper would benefit from careful proofreading to correct a few small details:
   • “Snow bowling” (abstract) should read “snowballing”
   • “re-enforce” (p. 4): reinforce
   • P. 10 “lesser resource investment in girls results in to an inferior status…” Delete "to"
   • P.12 “Unless serious, women neither discusses nor seeks medical advice” should read "...women neither discuss nor seek"
   • P. 12 “Except the life-threatening situation”: except in life-threatening situations

2. The present title is quite expansive. A tighter, more specific title would be very useful in delimiting the scope and focus of the paper.

Minor discretionary revisions
1. It would be useful to know why the body mapping exercise was chosen as an elicitation technique and as the first reviewer points out, whether it has been used in other similar studies. However, if, as the authors note in their review response, it is not central to this paper, then I would suggest omitting any mention of it.

2. P. 13 and p. 15, references to “fabricated” model. As the previous reviewer recommended, I would suggest using the more neutral term “socially constructed” instead.

3. P. 5: “extreme dearth of information” – this seems a bit overstated and I would suggest noting that there is a dearth of information/relatively limited information available.

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.