Reviewer's report

Title: Women and Postfertilization Effects of Birth Control: Consistency of Understanding, Beliefs, Intentions

Version: 1 Date: 31 May 2005

Reviewer: Melanie Gold

Reviewer's report:

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined? Yes, the question is new and it is well defined. However, the background of the paper (and the discussion) sounds like they were written for another paper about women's understanding, beliefs and intent to use different forms of birth control. The main goal of this paper, per the authors, is to assess the consistency of responses of subjects who answered a survey about their beliefs and understanding of how methods of contraception work. Thus, the background should review the literature on response consistency in survey research as well as discuss why this is important for this particular topic and in a clinical setting. The entire argument of the paper is for enhancing women's knowledge about how birth control methods work but without fully reviewing prior research in response consistency, what it means and why it is important.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work? There is not enough detail on the pilot-testing of the survey or regarding any waivers of written or parental consent in the methods section.

3. Are the data sound and well controlled? They are sound. The issue of control is not applicable to this survey study.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition? Yes.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data? No. The discussion should include much more about how the authors' data on response consistency compares with other research in the literature on response consistency. The conclusion does not address how consistency of response from the authors' data relates to the authors' conclusions.

6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found? No. The title is clear and appropriately informs the reader that this is a study about consistency of responses on a survey. However, the abstract results are presented in an order that makes the reader think that this paper will focus on subjects' beliefs and intents when the paper is really entirely about the consistency of subjects' responses. The abstract would more accurately represent the paper if lines 1-4 of the results section were moved to the end of the results section instead of leading the paragraph.

7. Is the writing acceptable? Yes. It is written in clear English

Detailed comments for Authors

Pages 4 and 5: The background of the paper (and the discussion) sounds like they were written for a different paper presenting results of women's understanding, beliefs and intent to use different forms of birth control. The main goal of this paper, per the authors, is to assess the consistency of responses of subjects who answered a survey about their beliefs and understanding of how
methods of contraception work. Thus, the background should review the literature on response consistency in survey research as well as discuss why this is important for this particular topic and in a clinical setting. The entire argument of the paper presented is to enhance women's knowledge about how birth control methods work but the authors do not provide a review of prior research in response consistency, what it means or why it is important.

Page 4, Background section, paragraph 2: the term clinically recognized pregnancy is not clear in the context of this sentence and should be clarified.

Page 4, paragraph 3, line 4: there should be a comma between personal and moral.

Page 5, Methods section: last paragraph, lines 4 and 5: should the term personal opinion be called beliefs?

Page 5, paragraph 1-3: Can the authors please clarify that the questionnaire from which the data for this paper was obtained was a self-administered survey (versus a face to face interview)? This is somewhat confusing throughout the paper. Also, how long did it take subjects to complete the survey?

Page 5, paragraph 1 - 3: Can the authors provide more information regarding how well subjects understood the staging terminology (either based on their pilot testing or this survey study)? More detail would be helpful in paragraph 3 where the authors refer to a work under review (reference 15). How old were the 21 patients in Salt Lake City who pilot tested the survey? When was this survey conducted? Will the authors make this survey available upon request via this journal?

Page 7, paragraph 1: The authors mention the religious affiliation of the organization. This could be more fully discussed in the discussion section as a potential bias of the population (although the authors did discuss the limitations of generalizability of their findings in the discussion)

Page 7, paragraph 2: The authors refer to study researchers presenting the questionnaire to subjects. Again please clarify if this was a self-administered survey or a face to face interview. What was the gender and background of the study researchers? Where they doctors, nurses, research assistants?

Page 7, paragraph 2: For subjects who were minors, was there a waiver of parental consent or did their parents have to give written consent? For all adult subjects, was written consent obtained to participate or was this waived?

Page 7, Statistical Analysis section, paragraph 3, line 3: there should be the word of between the words methods and birth control and the second methods should be deleted.

Table 1: Why were birth control methods used currently combined with future birth control methods in table 1 - these seem like two different levels of behavior (one is current use and the other is intent to use). Why were the transdermal patch and the vaginal ring not on the list of methods? When was this survey done? Pre-2002?

Pages 9 and 10 sentence structures for these pages of results are very complex and were often times confusing requiring multiple readings of each paragraph. Can these be simplified at all?

Page 11, paragraph 2, last line: the word nor should be changed to or.

Page 12- 16: the discussion should include how the authors data on response consistency compared to the literature on response consistency.
Page 13, paragraph 1: It would be helpful if the authors would address how women should be educated about the mechanism of action of birth control methods in light of the fact that it is often unknown what percentage of the time each method works by each stage.

Page 13, paragraph 2, line 5: change the word what's to what is

Page 15, paragraph 2: The authors should cite references to support their claim that it is the role of the package insert to educate women about early stages of human reproduction. This is controversial (though not presented as so by the authors). No other medications are expected to educate consumers about, say, the gastrointestinal system or the nervous system in the cases of medications such as H2 blockers or SSRIs. It is unclear why the package inserts of contraceptive should have a different role than that of other medications. Especially given that the exact mechanism of action of many contraceptives is not clearly know (in terms of % of time working at different stages).

Page 16, paragraph 3, line 5: The authors say filling out the questionnaire here but it would help in the methods section to clarify that this was a self-administered survey.

Page 17, Conclusion: How is consistency of response from the authors data related to this conclusion?

Page 18, reference 15: please add t to title of word postfertilization

Table 1: What were the patch, ring and natural family planning not included in the table? It would be helpful to include the n of the sample size so the table can stand alone. Why are 95% confidence intervals relevant here?

Table 2: Since the title of the table is Personal Opinion of What Stage a Birth Control Method May Act, why are abortion, RU-486 included in the table since they are not birth control methods? These should not be in a table labeled such or the title should be revised to more accurately reflect the variables. The sample size would help this table to stand alone.

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests