Reviewer’s report

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

Version: 2 Date: 17 October 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. The background of the paper (and the discussion) are much improved after the revisions.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work? There is now sufficient detail on the pilot-testing of the survey as well as the main study. The authors have added sufficient information about waivers of written and 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? Yes. The discussion is much improved and better balanced with the revisions. The authors did an excellent job addressing this reviewer’s comments.

6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found? Yes. The title is now clearer and appropriately informs the reader that this is a study about consistency of responses on a survey. The abstract revisions now more accurately reflect the main content of the paper.

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

The authors have done a laudable job addressing the reviewer’s comments and the manuscript is immensely improved. There only remain a few additional comments.

Abstract: Under methods: line 7-8, It would be more accurate if authors said “the questionnaire contained no information on where in the reproductive cycle methods of contraception worked” or “the questionnaire contained no information on the mechanism of action of different contraceptive methods” since this was not only limited to “no information about whether specific birth control methods act after fertilization”.

Background: 1st page, 2nd paragraph, line 1-3, the author cites that “many women in national polls in the US believe that human life begins at fertilization.” More specific data (like a percentage or number) would be useful here, since the term “many” is vague. How many?

Under Methods, Questionnaire Development, 2nd para, lines 4-6. The authors continue to lump together contraceptive methods (like abstinence, condoms, sterilization, natural family planning)
with medical and surgical abortion by calling them all “methods of birth control.” I still believe this distinction is important to some readers and should be discussed in the text. The authors did a nice job of discussing this in their response to the reviewer’s comments when they said:

“Although many people argue that surgical or medical abortion are not legitimate methods of family planning, others argue that abortion is an essential part of the spectrum of birth control methods that should be available to women. Strictly speaking, abortion is certainly a widely used method of reducing or controlling birth.” (some references here would strengthen the statement)

It might help clarify this distinction to readers if the authors included something in the text like their above response to the reviewer since not all readers will agree with the authors’ comment that “We don’t think anyone will have difficulty sorting out that birth control in this table (table 2) includes both family planning methods as well as medical and surgical abortion”.

It is possible that some readers will confuse medical and surgical abortion as indistinguishable from methods of birth control and this difference in interpretation should be discussed in the text since it is controversial.

Under Methods, Questionnaire Development, 3rd para, lines 3. Change the word “on” to “with” in the sentence reading “Pilot testing of the questionnaire was performed with 21 patients…” Also, I read the authors’ response that the age of the pilot-test subjects is not known. This is unfortunate but cannot be fixed. However, it would be helpful for the authors to say what number or percentage of the 25 pilot-test subjects in Tulsa were nurses versus patients since presumably nurses might have a higher level of understanding of medical terms like “implantation”, compared to less educated patients which might influence comprehension of the survey. Also, which three questions were added after the pilot testing?

Under results, end of paragraph 3, The authors might also wish to highlight in the text (because it is so interesting) that the birth control methods that women were most “unsure” about in terms of what stage they worked at were progestin-only pills, IUD and Depo-Provera (in addition to EC and natural family planning which is already highlighted in this section).

Under Discussion, 2nd para, Authors should put (TPB) at the end of the words “Theory of Planned Behavior” in the first sentence before using the acronym TPB in the 3rd sentence.

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests’