Reviewer's report

Title: What aspects of periods are most bothersome for women reporting heavy menstrual bleeding? Community survey and qualitative study

Version: 1 Date: 1 November 2006

Reviewer: Mark Shapley

Reviewer's report:

General
This interesting paper consists of a further analysis of information gained from a previously published cross-sectional survey in combination with a new study using qualitative methodology. This is a significant strength as the combination of approaches improves the validity of the qualitative research as well as providing quantitative data not previously published.

I do however have a number of concerns, which I will put in the format you require.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

1. Originality

The qualitative study replicates the work of others performed in primary and secondary care as the authors acknowledge. They claim originality, as the participants in the survey are a community population. They do not in the paper state whether or not they have excluded women who have consulted with primary or secondary care from their analysis of the community survey or excluded such women from the qualitative study. It is therefore not know if the participants are truly different from those in previously published studies. If they are then the study provides new and important information. If they are not then the work largely confirms the findings of previous studies.

2. Conclusions

As the premise for the originality of the study is that the population has not consulted primary or secondary care then any inferences drawn from the data should not be related to the consultation. The authors acknowledge that women who consult with heavy menstrual bleeding and those that do not consult are different but they give recommendations as to what to do in a consultation despite the study being based on data from a different population (women who have not consulted). I would suggest a greater emphasis is put on self-help leaflets, posters, websites and community education programs including the media and all reference as to what to do in a consultation removed.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Page 4 background (Coulter et al) should be (3)

Typo page 5 first line final paragraph should not contain a ?.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

1. Abstract

I found the results section unclear and would suggest structuring it into cross-sectional survey and qualitative study.

2. Background
Very good but why reference the Third National Morbidity Survey in preference to the more recent Fourth National Morbidity Survey?

3. Methods

The process of randomisation is not given. Any validation of the process for the classification of the free-text responses into the categories used? Who classified them and could this be a source of bias?

How were the 32 women selected for the qualitative study out of all the women with the particular characteristics? There does seem to be a large proportion of nurses.

4. Results

No information is given about differences between responders and non-responders although this is present in the previously published paper on the cross-sectional survey. Perhaps reference should be made to this?

Overall I enjoyed reading the paper and it gave me insight into the problems women have. I do need to be convinced that I could not have gained this from reading previous research although it has value in confirming the conclusions of previous studies.

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

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.