Reviewer’s report

Title: Values Clarification in a decision aid about fertility preservation: does it add to information provision? Two randomized experiments with healthy participants

Version: 2  Date: 6 March 2014

Reviewer: James Dolan

Reviewer’s report:

This paper reports the effects of including versus excluding a values clarification exercise within a fertility preservation decision aid and the relationships between personality and information seeking style on decision-aid related outcomes.

Major compulsory revisions

1. More information needs to be provided regarding the nature of the values clarification exercise.

Although the general format of the clarification procedure used in the study is outlined on page 7, there is not sufficient detail provided to fully understand what the exercise entailed, why it was expected to work, and it was implemented during the study. There also needs to be information provided regarding the theoretical basis, if any, of the clarification method used and if it has been shown to be effective in other contexts or pilot studies.

2. More details should be provided regarding the choice of personality and coping styles were chosen and what the constructs mean.

These terms are used but never really defined so are therefore difficult to fully understand.

3. More information needs to be provided about the decision aid.

Readers are told that the basic decision aid was long (20 and 26 pages for the version with and without the clarification exercise respectively) and originally designed for use in consultation with a clinician rather than for a decision by an individual patient. This information should be included in the methods section and a supplemental file containing the decision aid would be helpful. In addition, however, there should be additional discussion, beyond being simply noted as a limitation, of how this discrepancy between the way the decision aid was designed and how it was used for the study might affect the results.

4. The data reported in Table 1 and the conclusion to experiment 1 is confusing.

The sentence on page 15 “Secondary analyses within women who received a DA with VCE revealed less decisional conflict for women who used the VCE compared to those who did not use it, but with no certainty that it was the VCE that caused this difference, since there was no difference when VCE-users were
compared to women who received a DA with information only (without the VCE).” Does not seem consistent with the results presented in the Table. The post-hoc notation used in the table is quite difficult to follow. Please clarify.

5. An additional limitation not highlighted is whether these results can be generalized outside of the study context.

More discussion has to be included regarding the extent to which the results of a study done with participants who were not facing a real decision, using long, text-heavy decision aid originally designed for use in consultation with a provider, studying a values clarification exercise that has not been shown to be effective (at least based on the information provided in this manuscript) can be extrapolated to other decision aids and settings.

6. The lack of any effect of the emotional induction in experiment 1 is a noteworthy finding that should be discussed, if only briefly.

7. Please check the statistics regarding "make a decision" in table one. Is the difference between 80% & 82.2% really statistically significant?

8. Was decisional conflict measured pre-intervention?

Decisional conflict as an outcome measure is useful only when people are unsure what they should do. When comparing groups it is therefore important to confirm that there are no differences in pre-intervention decisional conflict. Was this done? If not, this possibility should be discussed as a study limitation and the results interpreted accordingly.

9. Information should be provided regarding the procedure used to allocate subjects to study groups.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

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.