Reviewer’s report

Title: Definitions, measurements and prevalence of Fear of Childbirth: A systematic review

Version: 0 Date: 13 Jun 2017

Reviewer: Wendy Hall

Reviewer's report:

This is an important paper because the prevalence of childbirth fear across jurisdictions has not been articulated and groups of researchers in different countries tend to operate in isolation from each other. I have a number of points which I think need to be addressed before your paper is suitable for publication. In your objectives you indicate that your aim is to summarize published literature on the prevalence of fear of childbirth (FOC) in the period covering pregnancy, labor and birth, and the first year postpartum; however, in your paper you clearly state that on p. 10, line 231 that you excluded papers on FOC during labor. That disjuncture calls into question the appropriateness of your methods given your stated aim. You need to change your aim throughout the paper. In your abstract you indicated that the papers with cut-off scores on the W-DEQ from 66 to 100 described moderate, severe/intense, and extreme/phobic fear. Zar's work indicated that moderate FOC using the Wijma includes scores from 38 to 65 as does Fenwick et al.'s paper and Hall et al.'s paper. You need to modify your statement in your abstract so that it does not appear that the score of 66 to 100 represents moderate FOC. It is understandable that you had difficulty combining results given the rather wide range of measures that were used to identify FOC; thus your comment about the narrative synthesis was important. In your paper you indicated that you excluded 76 papers rated as weak. That is a very high exclusion rate. It would have strengthened your paper to provide more information about that process. For example, I found a Canadian paper by Spice et al. entitled Prenatal fear of childbirth and anxiety sensitivity that was not included in your review. Would that have been an example of a weak paper? It was also not clear to me how you had 24 papers remaining and 23 populations if you excluded a population already in the review; those numbers do not add up. There was no indication that MEDLINE was searched. Why was that the case? On p. 14, lines 338-339 it is not clear what you meant when you indicated that only a combination of the late pregnancy rates was made. Is that a combination of two Laursen papers? The Spice et al. paper (Canadian), if it was not rejected as a weak paper, used a cut-off of greater than or equal to 85 which would have made it appropriate to include in your table where you reported prevalence of FOC in different countries only when cut-off scores for severe FOC were used. You made an important point about the four-point Likert response scale over-estimating FOC rates. It would have strengthened your paper to provide further justification for developing a measure using a single question given your criticism of the simpler measures. It is not clear what is meant by intervention for all women on p. 19 lines 466-467. Do you mean women with any FOC including moderate FOC or are you referring to the earlier comment in that paragraph about severe FOC? It seems very likely that culture-specific differences could account for some of the differences in women's FOC. It would have strengthened your paper to develop that idea further. Your focus throughout your paper on severe FOC was difficult to harmonize with one of your statements in your conclusion where you argued that testing the FOBS to develop a higher cut-off point would be beneficial. Are you arguing there that your team wanted another
measure that captured severe FOC with a more compact scale? In your concluding section it is not clear what you mean when you state that researcher-developed scales are not as accurate. All scales are researcher-developed. Can you please clarify?

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

No

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

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