Reviewer’s report

Title: A mixed methods investigation of surrogate end-of-life decisions among older adult partners

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Reviewer: Elizabeth Vig

Reviewer's report:

In this interesting study, older couples in the UK were interviewed about their end of life preferences and those of their partners. Multiple scenarios were given. They then were asked to describe how they envisioned making decisions for their partner. My individual comments appear below in the order in which they appear in the text.

1. Although this journal does not appear to have a word count for manuscript text, it could be shortened. The Background is especially long.

2. Abstract and elsewhere - the authors adopt the term "simulated decision" to describe the process of using substituted judgment to make the decision an individual believes their loved one would make. They explain the term, but it might be easier for the reader if they used a more familiar phrase, such as, "making a decision using substituted judgment".

3. Background, 3rd paragraph, first sentence, typo - should be "patients' " preferences.

4. In their discussion of previous research in the area of surrogate decision-making, the authors may want to consider looking at the work by Fritsch J et al, Making decisions for hospitalized older adults, J Clin Ethics, 2013, and Vig et al, Beyond Substituted Judgement, from J Amer Geriatrics Soc, 2006.

5. How do surrogates make decisions - some research has noted that surrogates make decisions based on their own person values/preferences. The authors may want to consider mentioning this approach.

6. Methods - more information about how the study participants were recruited is needed. How were potential participants approached - by mail, in person, etc? How did the authors define "older adults" and "long term relationships"?

7. Methods - Were there any inclusion and exclusion criteria for participation?

8. Methods - Were participants with cognitive impairment included or excluded? If so, how was this determined?
9. Methods - I am curious how the decision-making tool was introduced. It is possible that in introducing it, that substituted judgment was described or even promoted, which could have biased the responses of the participants on how they made decisions.

10. Methods - How did the scenarios vary? Were different participants given different percentages of different outcomes occurring? If so, subjects would need a fairly high numerical literacy to participate. If this is the case, this should be noted in a paragraph with limitations in the Discussion.

11. Were interview transcripts coded by one investigator or more than one? Were they any efforts to compare the coding assigned by different investigators?

12. Results - did any same sex couples participate?

13. Results - did the investigators do any power calculations to determine if they had an adequate sample size to be assured of the differences they found?

14. Table 1 - was any information about participants' educational level collected? See item # 10 above for why this would be important to include.

15. Table 1 - if "M" is "mean", this should be stated.

16. Quant results - an outlier was not included in the calculations. It is good that this is mentioned. However, there is a small segment of the population that have more extreme ideas, such as believing that any minute of living, regardless of one's condition is worthwhile. I am not sure whether leaving this couple out was appropriate.

17. Qual results - consider adding an identifier to the quotes to illustrate that the quotes used in the manuscript came from different participants. One option could be (female, 65 years old).

18. Qual results - process - these results also seem to illustrate that some long term partners do not actually talk together about their care preferences.

19. Discussion - I did not see a paragraph that discusses the limitations and generalizability of this research. See item # 10 above.

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

Yes

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

Unable to assess
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.

I recommend additional statistical review

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Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

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