Reviewer’s report

Title: TOO MUCH TIME? TIME USE AND FERTILITY-SPECIFIC QUALITY OF LIFE AMONG MEN AND WOMEN SEEKING SPECIALTY CARE FOR INFERTILITY

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Reviewer: Arthur Greil

Reviewer's report:

This manuscript uses data on 92 women making their initial contact with a fertility clinic and 62 of their male partners to explore whether time spent on infertility-related activities is related to fertility Quality of life and anxiety and whether the relationship differs by gender. The authors find that women spend more time on infertility-related activities (research, reflection, discussion with others, and logistics) than their partners. They also find that more time spent reflecting is associated with lower QoL for both men and women and with higher anxiety for men. Time spent in discussion with others was associated with higher anxiety for women and with higher social quality of life scores for men.

A number of researchers have looked at internet use among infertile men and women, but I am not aware of any other studies that examine the relationship between time spent on infertility-related activities and quality of life and anxiety. The study appears to have been competently done. The measures used are well established in the literature. The conclusions seem justified by the data. I have two mayor concerns: (1) the data have severe limitations that undermine their usefulness, and (2) The authors have not taken full advantage of the dyadic character of their data.

The authors list three limitations of their study. The first is that that their sample is a convenience sample of patients of one clinic and may not be representative of the entire population. I would like to point out that ANY sample of people who make contact with a fertility clinic would likely not be representative because only half of infertile women seek treatment. Secondly, the authors point out that their sample size is small and that this might limit their ability to detect significant associations. Another consequence of the small sample size is that it forced them in some cases to use binomial rather that ordinal measures. This is a serious limitation for studies of time use. The third limitation the authors mention is that the questions only ask about the previous 24 hours and that using a longer window of time may have yielded interesting results.

The authors should also mention that the use of a cross-sectional design makes it virtually impossible to draw any causal conclusions. We are at a loss to know whether more time spent reflected leads to lower quality of life or whether lower quality of life results in more time spent in reflection. The methodological limitations do not mean that the author's conclusions are not valid, and - indeed -they are careful not to make any unwarranted conclusions. Still these limitations do diminish the utility of this study.

While they authors have analysed their data appropriately, they have not taken full advantage of the
dyadic nature of their data. With the exception of the use of the McNemar's test to compare time use among male and female partners, for the most part the authors proceed as if they are working with two separate samples of men and women. Treating the data as truly dyadic (for example, by using structural equation modelling) would allow us to see for example whether her time use affects his quality of life and vice versa. In addition, the authors treat each of their time-use measures as a separate variable. They might have attempted (e.g. latent class analysis, IRT) to see if it is possible to construct a single global measure. This is not so much a criticism of what they have done as it a suggestion for what they might do in the future (perhaps with a larger sample).

I also have a few other, less serious concerns:

1. The first sentence makes it seem as though the paper is about fertility treatment, when in fact it is about quality of life. In addition, I find it hard to believe that 17% of American women seek treatment for infertility when only 8-12% are infertile and only half of infertile women seek treatment. The authors should try to be more precise with their use of language.
2. The point about distinguishing distress related to infertility and distress related to infertility treatment is good one and could perhaps be developed more fully,
3. The final sentence in the paragraph that begins on page 3 and carries over to page 4 reads awkwardly.
4. The data in the last paragraph on page 9 could be presented more clearly.
5. There is a large literature on gender and infertility distress that does not receive much mention here.
6. There is also a literature on dyadic coping and infertility that might be mentioned.

To summarize, this manuscript is good as far as it goes, but I think that more could be done with these data. It would be wonderful if the articles could replicate this study with a larger sample in the future.

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?
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Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
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