

## **Reviewer's report**

**Title:** Consanguinity and Reproductive Health among Arabs

**Version:** 1 **Date:** 22 June 2009

**Reviewer:** Marcia Inhorn

### **Reviewer's report:**

This article provides a very basic overview of rates of consanguinity in various countries of the Arab world. It then goes on to provide a brief review of both the negative and positive effects of consanguinity on Arab reproductive health parameters.

In recent years, a large literature has grown on consanguineous marriage and health effects. This research focus has been pushed forward by Alan Bittles and his group at Oxford and now includes studies from many parts of the Arab world and South Asia.

#### **Major Compulsory Revisions:**

The article under review appears to be a kind of “meta-presentation” of the existing studies, which are archived at something called the “Catalogue for Transmission Genetics in Arabs (CTGA) Database,” maintained by the Centre for Arab Genomic Studies in Dubai. The article does not describe this database in any detail, nor whether the Centre is responsible for generating original primary research data on consanguinity and health effects in Arab populations throughout the Middle East. The article would be much more valuable and interesting if it described the role of this Center, its efforts to become a primary site of data collection, and the “value added” of the current research being done on consanguinity in the Arab world. Why is this an important topic?

In addition, as currently written, the article itself does not add much to the existing literature. It provides very brief, scanty paragraphs on the health effects of consanguinity. Although autosomal recessive genetic defects are a huge problem in the Arab world—as documented in the earlier book by Teeb and colleagues—these kinds of defects are not described in any detail, for example, on p. 5 or in the conclusion. Furthermore, new information from the Mediterranean countries (Italy, Lebanon) on consanguinity and male infertility outcomes is not included in the article (see Latini, Bocchetti, Kobeissi in *Fertility and Sterility*).

The most helpful part of the article is the large table, which is nonetheless, difficult to read. Furthermore, the bibliography is garbled due to some problem in the word processing program used. It is incomprehensible on my computer.

In short, as one who has read a great deal of the literature on consanguinity in the Middle East and South Asia, this particular article offers very little in terms of

an original contribution. It could be substantially revised and rewritten to describe the importance of the new Centre and new database, and how these are generating a valuable evidence base for the region. Some of the material currently in the article could be retained, but then it would need to be substantially expanded, especially the portions on autosomal recessive defects.

Minor Essential Revisions:

Finally, this article only hints at why consanguineous marriages continue, including among the young Arab populations, especially in the petro-rich Gulf. The rationales for cousin marriages have been described in great detail elsewhere. This literature needs to be described and cited. Otherwise, the article might perpetuate the vilifying portrayal of Arabs as “backward, inbreeding tribal peoples.” That would be an unfortunate portrayal, indeed, especially given that the UAE (and parts of the Gulf in general) are extremely cosmopolitan places.

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

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**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.