

Reviewer's report

Title: Antenatal Screening and the Gendering of Genetic Responsibility

Version: 1 **Date:** 24 May 2007

Reviewer: Heather Rowe

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General

The subject of this protocol is of importance to field of reproductive health and should be of interest to readers of the Journal. However, it is in need of a number of revisions outlined below.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Background

Para 1

- Pilnick 2004 is not the appropriate reference for these statements. Please provide one
- Clarify the final sentence. Testing both partners detects, but does not “result in” fetal abnormality.
- Para 1 lists a number of antenatal tests. The author needs to emphasise which of these tests will be the subject of this study.

Para 2

- The following false assumption needs to be corrected: Whilst it is certainly true that “little is known about male partners’ views and involvement in antenatal blood screening”, it does not necessarily follow that most existing research on antenatal screening “assumes that women take the major responsibility for the health of the fetus”. There are many factors that explain the preponderance of research in reproductive decision-making with female participants, not the least of which is the logistical reality that pregnant women are easier to access for research than their male partners. It is well known that male partners (and others) have an important role in decision making.
- A review of relevant literature should be provided.
- Given the aims spelt out in the five dot points in the final para, the background should provide an argument that antenatal screening is gendered, or state that this question is to be addressed in the research. A detailed statement of hypothesis (see below) and rationale is required.

Para 3

- Whilst it is common practice for qualitative research methods to avoid the use of pre-existing hypotheses, this protocol should nevertheless provide clearly defined aims and objectives. The concepts of “gender” and “parental genetic responsibility” should be clearly defined, and research questions clearly stated.
- There appears to be confusion between an underlying assumption (that screening is “gendered”) and a research question about exploring the importance of gender in relation to antenatal screening, as indicated by the first four dot points. The author should clarify this position.

Method

Sampling and accessing respondents

- A justification for the chosen sample size of 20 each men and women should be provided. The sample size should be stated in the protocol, not only in the abstract.
- This section requires much more detail (the protocol should be a “detailed statement of intent”). What methods will be used for recruitment? Will all women be invited to take part? What opportunities for sampling bias will exist? How will privacy during interviews be assured? How will men be recruited “through their partners”?
- Include reference number, date of approval and full name of the Human Research Ethics Committee who approved the project.
- More detail regarding data analysis is required. What are “appropriate research categories” and how will they be generated?

- It is difficult to see the value of publication of this protocol at this stage of data collection.

Discussion

- A statement of how these findings will add to existing theory should be included here.
- Given the stated restrictions in clinical practice in antenatal screening, what might be the implications of the findings for the inclusion of men in these services?

- It is good to see that the sampling strategy will attempt to represent sociodemographic diversity, but due care should be expressed regarding interpretation of findings. As the author acknowledges, cultural practices and beliefs in addition to sociodemographic factors play an important role in matters of reproductive decision making, and any generalization of the findings of interviews with 40 people to the wider population should be explicitly avoided and the limitations of the study clearly stated.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Reject as not of sufficient priority to merit publishing in this journal

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.