**Academic Review**

Article title: The association between anemia and postpartum depression in Bedouin mothers in southern Israel

Target journal: *Women and Birth*

Instructions to authors: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/journal/women-and-birth/publish/guide-for-authors>

**Summary**

The present article involves an examination of anemia and postpartum depression and their relationship in a vulnerable group of mothers in southern Israel. The aim was to determine if these conditions are causally linked in this population, based on previous work in other populations showing that anemia and/or iron deficiency increase the risk of neurophysiological conditions, including postpartum depression. A full language edit has been conducted and the present report focuses on the suitability of the manuscript for publication. Overall, the work is interesting, valuable, and well-presented. The target journal is appropriate for the subject matter and the readership of the journal should find the work pertinent and even actionable.

**Suitability of the target journal**

The manuscript is currently being submitted to the journal *Women and Birth*. The journal “publishes on all matters relating to pregnancy, birth, and the first six weeks post-partum”. The readers of the journal include many who would be interested in the subject matter of the current article, such as midwives, nurses specializing in maternity care, obstetricians, and policy makers and researchers. This is the official journal of the Australian College of Midwives but the journal clearly states that the editorial board is multi-national and that submissions from all over the world are welcomed. Indeed, the subject matter of the present article is in many ways universal and, although the focus is on a specific ethnic minority in southern Israel, its findings are relevant for all minorities and vulnerable groups. Accordingly, the target journal is appropriate and a good choice for a first submission.

Another key consideration is that the journal has a “Your Paper Your Way” submission policy. This means that first submissions do not have to strictly follow the formatting and style guidelines of the journal. Several basic formatting requirements must be adhered to and certain information must be provided but this submission policy streamlines the preparation of articles.

However, the journal uses a variant of UK spelling: “Our journal uses UK spelling, for example, recognise rather than recognize. We also spell fetal rather than foetal.” The document is currently in US spelling. This is not a problem for the first submission and I would not change the subtype of language used at this juncture because most journals nowadays publish in American English. If the manuscript is accepted by *Women and Birth*, some modifications to the English will be required. If so, it would be helpful to look at recent articles published in the journal for guidance.

**Title page**

The title page is well-presented and complete, containing all required components and information (e.g., article title, authors and their affiliations, corresponding author details, various disclaimers, and author contributions). I have added an asterisk to mark the corresponding author (asterisks are typically used in pairs). It may also be useful to state the type of article that is being submitted. This should certainly be stated in the cover letter. For example, the first paragraph of the cover letter should include a sentence like, ‘We would like to submit the attached manuscript, entitled “The association between anemia and postpartum depression in Bedouin mothers in southern Israel”, for publication as a Research Article in *Women and Birth*.’ It is also important to note that, if the manuscript is ultimately submitted to another journal, some journals ask that the disclaimers (e.g., funding, conflicts of interest, and authors’ contributions) be placed after the main text (but before the References).

One improvement that could be made is to the title. While the title adequately describes the topic of the article, it is vague. A title noting the main result would be more interesting. For example, “Anemia increases the risk of postpartum depression in Bedouin mothers in southern Israel” or “Anemia is associated with increased risk of postpartum depression in Bedouin mothers in southern Israel”.

**Abstract**

The Abstract is well-organized and well-written, appropriately and succinctly introducing the background for the readers, describing the methods, stating the main results, and providing a clear conclusion. The word count limit of the journal has been respected. I should say, however, that I would not increase the abstract length any further, even if the manuscript is submitted to a journal with a longer word count allowance for the abstract: all required information has already been provided. Note that the 95% CI is missing and that some work was required, particularly in the Results section, to understand and express the authors’ intended meaning.

**Introduction**

The Introduction appropriately follows the standard approach, beginning with a general introduction to the topic, providing some related background information, and concluding with the specific aim of the work. However, at ~1150 words, the Introduction is quite long and includes some unnecessary information. The background provided should be necessary to understand the context of the study. For example, the information on Bedouin society is very useful, particularly for international readers who are not likely to understand the population being studied. On the other hand, I would not consider the benefits of breastfeeding to be useful (marked using a margin comment in the revised document), for a couple of reasons. First, the readership of the journal must be considered. *Women and Birth* is a highly specialized journal, and the readers will undoubtedly know the importance of breastfeeding. Indeed, the role of breastfeeding in promoting infant and maternal health is now, thankfully, understood by the general public. Second, the specific relationship of breastfeeding with anemia and postpartum depression is unclear. In particular, the impact of anemia on breastfeeding is not explained. I would remove this information.

To further reduce the length of the Introduction, you could consider removing the text from “Recognition of postpartum anemia…” to the end of the paragraph (which includes the benefits of breastfeeding noted above). Some of this information could be incorporated into the Discussion if you wish to add some information on iron supplementation strategies (see my suggestion below in the Discussion section).

I have used other margin comments to highlight other issues. In addition, I have slightly reorganized Paragraph 3 so that the reader is taken from the general impact of iron deficiency to the specific impact of anemia in women and in terms of PPD. Finally, it is better to have a short final paragraph where the aims are clearly stated. For this reason, I have placed the aim of the study as its own paragraph.

**Methods**

The Methods section is excellent. It is very well-organized and appropriately describes the study design and population, procedures and measurements, statistical analysis, and ethical matters. The potential concerns of reviews and readers have been addressed, such as the validity of the postpartum measure used and the approach taken if a participant obtained a score greater than 10 on the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale or reported thoughts of self-harm.

I have noted some major changes made using margin comments and, in some cases, asked that further information be provided. In particular, regarding the breakdown of anemia based on hemoglobin level, I could not find the figures used in the manuscript in the cited document. Please double check the citation. Moreover, the subheadings are a little unclear: “Study measures” encompasses “Dependent variable” and “Independent variables” but should presumably also include “Sociodemographic characteristics”, “Socioeconomic status”, and “Reproductive health variables”. I have thus changed the subheading style to better reflect the subdivision of the Methods but please check and modify if necessary.

**Results**

Once again, the results are clearly communicated. The main findings are expressed in an easy to understand manner. I have made some changes to the language used but I had no trouble understanding the results themselves. Importantly, the meaning and significance of the results have been left to the Discussion section. In addition, there is no major overlap between the results and the data contained in the figures or tables, which can be a problem in some manuscripts.

The results themselves are interesting and a valuable contribution to the field.

**Discussion**

The Discussion section correctly begins with a brief summary of the aims of the work and main results. The results are then discussed in relation to the literature. The authors clearly know the field very well and have cited a large number of studies pertaining to anemia and postpartum depression, particularly in relation to minority groups. The authors’ arguments are clear and well-founded, supported by the results of the present study and those of other studies. The limitations of the work have been fully considered and explained.

However, I wonder if it would it be possible to discuss strategies that have previously helped to ameliorate anemia, particularly in postpartum mothers. It would be helpful to mention policies that have been implemented (and their effects) or studies that have been conducted showing the impact of, for example, iron supplementation on mental health. This would increase the value of the work and maybe even help professionals who work with such vulnerable women.

**Conclusions**

I would consider the Conclusion section to be a little long. The best Conclusion sections are short and to the point. This is probably something that has been considered, given that the paragraph is very well-written and appropriately structured and it is not immediately clear what exactly can be removed. However, with a little rewriting, the text from “Our sample has…” to “…in this vulnerable population” could be deleted. The first sentence could thus be changed to, “We have identified an association between anemia and PPD in a vulnerable population of Bedouin women in southern Israel” or even, “We have identified an association between anemia and PPD in a vulnerable population of Bedouin women in southern Israel with high rates of anemia and PPD, low educational levels, low socioeconomic status, and restricted access to health services”.

**Figures and Tables**

Unfortunately, the figures require some work. First, the figures do not need to be three-dimensional. Two-dimensional (i.e., flat) bar graphs would adequately illustrate the data and many journals discourage three-dimensional bar graphs. In addition, some information is missing. Specifically, the unit (g/dl) is required in Figure 1. I would also replace “HB” with “Hemoglobin”. All figures require a Y-axis label, such as “Number of participants”.

Regarding the tables, they are appropriately designed. Nonetheless, I have left some comments in the margin of the document because there are some issues requiring work. For example, what is the meaning of the asterisk in Table 2? As noted above, asterisks are typically used in pairs. The reader will expect there to be a corresponding asterisk in the table footer explaining its meaning. In addition, the confidence interval in Table is given as 90% when it is 95% in the rest of the document. Any errors in the statistical analysis or its reporting may compel a peer reviewer or journal editor to doubt the validity of the analytical methods.

**References**

For a “Your Paper Your Way” submission, the references just need to be in a consistent and understandable format. If the manuscript is accepted, the references will need to be formatted to meet journal requirements. These can be seen easily in recent articles from the journal. The References section is appropriate for a first submission. Regardless, there are some errors in the references and they will need to be checked. For example, capital letters should be used for “Bedouin” and “Jewish” in Treister-Goltzman et al. A couple of citations contain double spaces (Central Bureau of Statistic and WHO). Finally, incorrect spelling and punctuation is used in “Central Bureau of Statistic. (2014, )” (should be “Central Bureau of Statistics. (2014)”). There may be further errors.

**Other considerations**

The meaning of the highlighted text (e.g., green and yellow highlight) is unclear and the highlighting will of course have to be removed. The unit was sometimes omitted (e.g., “hemoglobin < 12” instead of “hemoglobin < 12 g/dL”). Some editors and peer reviewers do not like statements of primacy (being the “first” to do something). Thus, you may be asked to change or even remove the sentence, “To our knowledge, this is the first study in Israel, specifically among Bedouin mothers, to examine the association between postpartum anemia and PPD.” Personally, I do not consider such statements necessary because any previous studies in this population would have been cited. The sentence can be deleted without affecting the meaning of the preceding and subsequent sentences.

For a double-blind review, the manuscript cannot contain any identifying information. Thus, as I am sure you know, the title page (with author information) will have to be submitted separately. A simple title page containing the title can be submitted with the main text. In addition, the ethical approval details will have to be removed. You can replace it for the review process with a simple statement stating, “This study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and was approved by all relevant ethics review committees. Informed written consent was obtained from all study participants at recruitment”.

Finally, if the article is accepted, the relevant reporting guidelines will need to be followed, such as STROBE for observational cohort, case-control, and cross-sectional studies: <https://www.elsevier.com/__data/promis_misc/04262_STROBE_Checklist.doc> Personally, I would follow the STROBE guidelines for the first submission because it will improve the quality of the work and the journal editor(s) will be more likely to accept the manuscript for review.