**Between dispelling hope and leaving them in the state of ‘inbetweeness’: Moral dilemmas of research on infertility treatment seeking in Kerala.**

**General Comments**

The author provides insightful field data on doctoral work on infertility. The main objective of the author is to present the dilemmas of the researcher while carrying out the research study, particularly during the data collection stage. The presentation of data about perspectives of infertility by women in itself is significant for health studies in India. It would be helpful for readers and be of important contribution to the field of healthcare and medical ethics if the researcher provides 1) in-depth analysis and engagement with existing literature and 2) direct the readers to major objectives or arguments, rather than briefly touching upon many themes (if that is the aim, it lacks depth and require much analysis of each theme). The main concern of the present manuscript is that it doesn’t achieve the intended objective of the paper with rich analysis and engagement with literature. Also, the mentioned objective about the researcher's dilemma can be discussed in detail without much reference to data descriptions or provide the narratives where necessary. However, an in-depth analysis of data with existing literature would greatly benefit and contribute to the medical ethics debates. Also, a detailed methodology and theoretical framework need to be added if the aim is to present the data. I suggest the author refrain from presenting qualitative data quantitatively, rather provide the interpretation and analysis with thick description.

As I understand, the author engages with moral dilemmas during the fieldwork. There are many well-established literature and studies on the researcher’s dilemmas, and the ways researchers navigate and justify the decisions. I strongly suggest that the author refer to such literature, particularly on reflexivity and epistemic injustice (I have provided below some suggested readings), as I could see the conceptual argument by the author around it.

**Specific comments**

**Comment 1: Page 3 & 4, Line 31-33, 1-17**

Before providing your position, please do provide the research context and the brief details about the study.

While discussing your position, it would be helpful and useful for readers to know more about the larger theoretical and conceptual framework you position your study and your analysis.

**Comment 2: Methods section**

If you are retaining the data description, then detailed methodology regarding sample, data analysis and theoretical framework needs to be provided.

a) Provide the reasoning for selecting districts.

b) Why the structured interview schedule was incorporated given the qualitative phenomena was the focus?

c) How was the sampling of participants decided? For instance, why the number of participants was 18, and why only 2 were husbands.

d) Provide detailed data analysis approach and method, and theoretical framework.

e) Ethical considerations of the consent for interview, and how effectively it was carried as you mention they considered you as part of the medical team given that you contacted them through ASHA worker(Page 2, line 15). What were the ethical implications of that decision and were there possible ways you could have carried out the study?

**Comment 3: Stages of care-seeking**

Page 7, line 2- Were all the 457 women planning a family or had planned to have a child and was accessing infertility treatment?

Why there is explicit focus only on women when the study focused on couples? Please provide details.

**Comment 4: Findings and discussion**

Require in-depth analysis of data along with existing literature, particularly in the discussion section. Thick description of narratives is lacking.

**Comment 5: Moral dilemma**

The objective of this paper is about the moral dilemma of the researcher, however, the author has not provided rich analysis and in-depth discussion regarding the researcher’s positionality and the ethical implications within the research study. I strongly suggest the author engage with existing literature on reflexivity and the related themes around the emancipation and empowerment as well as a critical theoretical approach which suggests ways of doing ethnography. The author’s moral decision and positionality needs to be situated and discussed in the background of context and ethical arguments.

**Suggested readings**

Finlay, L (2002) Negotiating the swamp: The opportunity and challenge of reflexivity in research practice. Qualitative Research 2(2): 209–230.

Etherington, K (2004) Becoming a Reflexive Researcher: Using Our Selves in Research. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Kanpol, B (1997) Reflective critical inquiry on critical inquiry: A critical ethnographic dilemma continued. The Qualitative Report 3(4): 1–12.

Pellatt, G (2003) Ethnography and reflexivity: Emotions and feelings in fieldwork. Nurse Researcher 10(3): 28–37.