Reviewer’s report

Title: Predictors of the timing of initiation of antenatal care in an ethnically diverse urban cohort in the UK

Version: 1 Date: 23 October 2012

Reviewer: Mats Malqvist

Reviewer’s report:

Thank you for letting me review this manuscript on the predictors of early initiation of ANC. The paper is quite simple and clear, easy to follow and straight to the point. The strength is the relatively large sample that allows for a more detailed analysis based on ethnicity compared to previous studies in the field.

Major compulsory revisions

My first comment is regarding education. Years of schooling or educational level are not included as a variable in the study, most likely because of lack of information in the registers accessed. However, since it is well established that education plays such a vital role in the utilisation of health care I would like to see some more discussion around this structural determinant. To acknowledge that it has been considered and discussed among authors.

My next comment is about the concept of ethnicity. How was this defined? Since it was a registry study it must have been noted somewhere; by whom, and on what grounds? Self-defined or based on country of origin? The paper would gain from a short discussion about the different definitions and concepts of ethnicity as a background.

The tables are laid out nicely, especially I like that the actual numbers (n) are included in table 2. I have however a concern regarding the theoretical basis for the analysis. You are mixing different hierarchical levels in your multivariable analysis, such as ethnicity and occupation (structural determinants) and maternal age, parity, language ability and housing status (intermediary determinants). Furthermore you also include many variables that have logical interactions such as parity and age; ethnicity and language ability; ethnicity and birthplace, which will lead to overadjustment. These issues need to be discussed and clear statements of the choices made need to be demonstrated. I would also suggest that you add some interaction terms or do some stratified analyses, which would be quite doable considering your large sample size.

Minor essential revisions

1. Why only Somali women and African non-Somali women. What about the “east-African” women, Ethiopian, or other distinct cultural spheres?
2. Table 2 is mentioned before table 1 in the text, usually the tables are numbered according to their mentioning in the ms.
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.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests