Reviewer's report

Title: Birth setting, transfer and maternal sense of control: results from the DELIVER study

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Reviewer: Wendy Christiaens

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Review Birth setting, transfer and maternal sense of control: results from the DELIVER study

General comments

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined? Yes, but no hypotheses were formulated.
2. Are the methods appropriate and well described? Yes
3. Are the data sound? Yes.
4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition? Yes.
5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data? No, see detailed comments and suggestions.
6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated? Yes
7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished? Strictly speaking, yes, but I do miss theoretical underpinnings and the formulation of clear well built hypotheses.
8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found? No, see detailed comments about abstract.
9. Is the writing acceptable? As I am not a native speaker, I feel not well placed to evaluate the language, but I have included some suggestions in the detailed comments below.

Detailed comments

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

1. The two last sentences before the sensitivity analysis could be mentioned earlier, more specifically in the method section: groups of planned and actual place of birth or transfer.
2. Results section: last sentence before ‘planned place of birth and LAS score’: women in the home birth group were less anxious during pregnancy for giving birth.
3. Check spelling of Chronbach’s alpha --> Cronbach’s alpha?
4. I miss a table with regression coefficients of the models.

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

1. The background section is thin. There is little theory behind it, and no clear hypotheses are formulated.
2. In the background and/or discussion section I miss the comparison with LAS scores in other studies/countries/comparable settings.
3. The general research question contains two sub questions. The manuscript would benefit from a distinction between the two (throughout the whole text): 1) Is the sense of control associated with place of birth? 2) is the sense of control associated with being transferred?
4. In a next step hypotheses could be formulated for these two questions, with the necessary reference to previous empirical and theoretical literature.
5. The manuscript is difficult to read because of the multiple comparisons made. I would suggest to make comparisons always very explicit ‘what is compared to what’ to make it easier for the reader to follow.
6. The choice of the reference groups is not well explained. I think other choices would also have been meaningful. Why did the authors choose these reference groups in their analysis?
7. What is the main message? Is it about the comparison between hospital and home births? Or is it about ‘with or without transfer’? Or both? Now these two ‘histories’ are mixed up. For example, in the abstract, and in the last sentences of the discussion section (p. 10-11) the comparison is limited to home and hospital births, while being transferred or not is not mentioned, although being transferred has a meaningful impact on feelings of control. In order to have a more balanced manuscript, both ‘histories’ should be presented and discussed in the same way (starting with the research questions and hypotheses). Now I get the impression that the impact of being transferred is downplayed a bit. In addition in the introduction the main argument is about transfers, while in results and discussion section it is turned into the home versus hospital comparison. More consistence in the narrative throughout the manuscript is needed.
8. The idea of transfer should be well defined. Transfer from home to hospital is one thing, transfer from primary to secondary care is another. Being transferred to hospital, but still with a midwife attending the birth is different from being transferred to hospital and give birth under the supervision of an obstetrician. Is a transfer to a hospital always a transfer to secondary care? This is not clear.
9. The group hospital-home has a LAS score comparable to the home-home group. This is remarkable, but the authors do not pay attention to it, nor try to explain this. Lack of control and dissatisfaction are associated with violated expectations. In the hospital-home group one would expect that expectations were not met, while feelings of control are high. This is interesting… and could
perhaps mean that expectations were surpassed, resulting in feeling in control. It would be interesting to discuss this finding in the discussion section.

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

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I have no competing interests.