Reviewer’s report

Title: Systematic review of health care interventions to improve outcomes of disabled pregnant and postnatal women and their families

Version: 1 Date: 27 October 2013

Reviewer: Lesley Tarasoff

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Major Compulsory Revisions

1) An explanation of why many different types of disability were included in this review is needed. For instance, interventions may be different based on disability type (i.e., an intervention for a HIV-positive woman may be different than for an intellectually disabled woman, a woman with a spinal cord injury, a woman who is hearing impaired, a woman with schizophrenia, etc.)

2) Said differently, while the authors refer how the ICF define disability in the background section, it may be useful for them to provide their own definition (i.e., how do they define, use and measure disability?) and why they included such a broad range in their search.

Discretionary Revisions

1) Attention to epistemological and theoretical orientation is important. The terms "women with disabilities" and "disabled women" are used simultaneously in the paper, though these terms may have different meanings (e.g., difference between health sciences and critical disability perspectives).

2) The sentence structure throughout the paper could use some work. Some of the sentences are incomplete/choppy (fragments) or run-ons; the paper reads poorly at times as a result (this is particularly the case in the background and methods sections, e.g., in the Data synthesis section: "As we expected the studies we identified were of an extremely heterogeneous nature we predominantly used tabulation and narrative synthesis" - this would read better as: "As we expected, the studies we identified were of an extremely heterogeneous nature. As such, we predominantly used tabulation and narrative synthesis"). The paper would benefit from a copy editing. As someone who does work in this area, I am aware of the various terms and acronyms the authors refer to but others may not (e.g., United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities - authors neglect to include the qualifier "United Nations" the first time they mention the Convention for example.

4) I am curious as to why the authors did not look at the United States National Institutes of Health (NIH) website and the various relevant professional associations (ACOG) for their search, as there are resources beyond the WHO, UN, DH, and NICE that may have informed their search and garnered further results (see for example http://www.acog.org/About_ACOG/ACOG_Departments/Women_with_Disabilities).
Indeed, 2 of the studies analyzed were conducted in the US.

Overall comments:

The paper is laid out well and the review is methodologically sound. I commend the authors for acknowledging the need to involve disabled women in population-based research and for clearly articulating the limitations of their review and by extension the reality that there really is a paucity of research concerning interventions for disabled women during the perinatal period.

I somewhat disagree with the authors' note in the background section (bottom of page 4) that there is little information concerning "actions targeting disabling barriers." While there may not be evaluations of interventions, there is a growing body of literature identifying various disabling barriers (e.g., Signore et al., 2011; Tarasoff, 2013). Perhaps I am missing the authors’ point though, as I am unclear what they mean by "disabling barriers" (page 4 and 6).

I am unsure of how useful the paper is overall to advancing the field, given the broad range of disability included / searched for the review, and subsequently, the few studies actually included in the review. Those doing work in this area are arguably already aware that there is a paucity of research. It may be wise to revise the title and abstract of the review to reflect the results of the review; as they exist, the title and abstract are somewhat misleading (too broad).

In short, I am unsure if this paper should be ranked "Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions" or "Reject because too small an advance to publish."

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

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

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