Reviewer's report

Title: The role of support and other factors in early breastfeeding cessation: an analysis of data from a maternity survey in England

Version: 1 Date: 20 November 2013

Reviewer: Della Forster

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This paper describes a large study exploring the determinants of breastfeeding cessation. The paper is well written, but requires some amendments and/or clarifications.

BACKGROUND

The background includes the relevant literature and provides the study rationale. Only one other study could be perhaps included in describing the socio-economic disparities in breastfeeding – and that is the paper by Amir, L. H., & Donath, S. M. (2008) - Socioeconomic status and rates of breastfeeding in Australia: evidence from three recent national health surveys. Med J Aust, 189(5), 254-256.

METHODS

Could 'tailored reminders' be clarified.

I think (but am not sure) that it should be 'continuity of carer' and not 'continuity of care'.

It would be good to use 'birth' not 'delivery' throughout the paper.

There needs to be some extra detail given in the description of the statistical analysis, particularly in relation to the logistic regression model. It is not clear in the first paragraph what the ORs were calculated for (it is hard to tell without turning to the tables). Then in the same paragraph it is not clear whether when variables were dropped, whether it was taken into account if dropping then made a difference to the model.

It is not clear what is meant when it is says that 'p is the prevalence of the support variable among those who stopped breastfeeding'. I think it is the percentage of people who had ceased breastfeeding who had received the type of support being discussed, but am not sure. It would be good to make it very clear so all readers can understand readily.

Regarding the four variables with missing data, it would be good to state what these are, so that readers can decide if they consider this to be a reasonable decision and to be able to consider the possible impact.

RESULTS

It is quite difficult to understand the main points in the section on breastfeeding cessation at 10 days. Could these be stated more succinctly?

I wonder if further rationale could be given about the decision to separate out the
two breastfeeding cessation time points for the regression analysis. In some ways the support systems will be relevant at both periods of time, and many of the factors had an impact at both points.

Including gestation as a variable in a group of term infants seems unusual. Again I am not clear on the rationale for this, and on the reasons that might be suspected for differences by this category.

I was unable to find Table 5.

It seems like a big step to suggest causality between the three variables that were looked at as population attributable fractions and breastfeeding cessation.

My main concern regarding this whole discussion of the role of support factors is the issue of whether those women more likely to seek support were also the same women with a higher breastfeeding intention. If this is the case, then the amount of support a woman seeks is correlated with intention, so association is blurred. This may or may not be the case here, but there is no discussion of this as a possibility, either in the results or discussion. As I read the paper, the only type of support that is reported actively provided is that by the midwives – the other types of support suggest that women need to be proactive to obtain them.

TABLES and FIGURES

Table 4 – the item on ‘did not need help and advice re feeding’ is very difficult to understand with the double negative. Could this be reanalysed and presented the other way?

Table S1 – there is not comment about this is in the paper (unless I missed it). The title on this suggests that these are all factors which are not associated with breastfeeding cessation. I am not sure this is necessarily the case – I wonder whether some of these factors were not adequately powered to show a difference. For example a number of the variables have large differences between categories, e.g. being a single mother, birthweight, skin to skin contact. There needs to be some comment on this.

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 declare that I have no competing interests'