Reviewer's report

Title: Behaviour change in perinatal care practices among rural women exposed to a women's group intervention in Nepal [ISRCTN31137309]

Version: 2 Date: 3 March 2006

Reviewer: Diana Elbourne

Reviewer's report:

General
This is an important paper to amplify information from the previously published papers about the trial. There is a lot of material, and most of my comments are requests for clarification to help readers (including me) to understand it.

Major compulsory revisions
1. Given that this study looks at differences in practice between pregnancies pre and post the trial, it is necessarily based on multigravid women and so the findings cannot necessarily be extrapolated to women having their first baby. This needs to be clearly stated throughout the paper.
2. Please clarify whether pre-trial information recorded on a previous pregnancy for ALL women with a previous pregnancy who had a pregnancy during the trial? If not, state what were the reasons for the missing data and whether the numbers differed by allocation?
3. In the paragraph beginning “Combining the BETTER and BAD categories...” the 2nd sentence implies that the randomised groups were not similar at baseline in terms of their previous practices. If this is the case, it is rather important and should have some comment.
4. In the next paragraph, referring to BETTER and WORSE, the text says that “women in the intervention clusters were more likely to make a positive as opposed to detrimental change for all outcomes”. I can see this for the BETTER rows in Table 2, but not in the WORSE rows for antenatal care attendance where it is higher for Intervention than Control (8.2% vs 5.2%). Please clarify.
5. Similarly, I can’t relate the next sentence of the text (about dressing of the cord) from the WORSE rows in Table 2. Please clarify.
6. The fact that the effect of intervention as shown by the BETTER:WORSE ratio seems to go significantly in the opposite direction from the other three practices for antenatal care needs a bit more mention.
7. In Table 2 and throughout: why is there no information on the BETTER:GOOD ratio which was introduced in the Methods section (other than in the paragraph headed “The independent effect of attending a women’s group”)?
8. In that paragraph, it appears that the effect on antenatal care as shown in the BETTER:WORSE ratio has reversed and become beneficial. This seems strange and needs some comment.
9. Indeed, the data that are relevant to that paragraph are only shown selectively. Perhaps a repeat of table 2 for those attending groups only would make it easier for readers to see what’s happening?
10. Similarly, the data in Table 3 are selective. Presumably the same information was analysed for the BETTER:WORSE and BETTER:GOOD ratios as suggested in the textual commentary and could be made available to readers?
11. Whether the data are shown or not, a large number of analyses were carried out. There therefore needs to be some recognition about the problems of multiplicity. This is particularly clear in Table 3 where the bold figures showing statistical significance are well scattered throughout this table, suggested at least some of the findings may be chance. Were there any prior hypotheses about the directions (if not the size) of effect?
Minor essential revisions
1. The term “eligible women” needs to be defined when first met (2nd paragraph of Introduction)
2. The term ‘retrospective’ jars slightly. Yes, it is retrospective but the important descriptor is that it’s pre-trial.
3. Should it be skilled birth attendants, rather than attendance? (2nd paragraph of Introduction)
4. Change verbal (in words) to oral (as opposed to written) consent (assuming that is the intended meaning)
5. The columns in the Tables should be headed “Practices in previous pregnancies”

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes

Declaration of competing interests:

'I declare that I have no competing interests'