Reviewer's report

Title: Satisfaction with childbirth in Belgium and the Netherlands

Version: 1 Date: 9 March 2007

Reviewer: Ellen Hodnett

Reviewer's report:

General

This is an interesting study, but the report would benefit from substantive editing in the Background, Literature Review, and Results.

I enjoyed reading the discussion and conclusions sections, which are derived appropriately from the results, and succinctly written.

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------

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

Background

1. There are sweeping, unsupported generalizations in the Background. Try to reference all statements. For example, I think Belgian health care professionals would be rightfully upset by their characterization as providers that treat pregnant women as passive and lacking in knowledge or authority. I think it would be better to describe the two different approaches, with supporting references.

2. There is no description of the analytical typology. Use a better source than personal communication for home birth statistics.

Literature Review

3. Labour pain: I would not characterize the relationship between pain and satisfaction as puzzling. The Hodnett reference (i.e. my review) is to a systematic review of the relationship between pain and satisfaction. The single studies referred to in this section are consistent with the findings of the systematic review.

4. “Satisfaction” needs to be defined – Either see the Hodnett systematic review for an overview of the complexity of the construct, the various conceptualizations of it, and the problems in measuring it, or be clear about how you have defined it.

5. The literature review would benefit from major reorganization. The last paragraph should be the first paragraph; it provides a useful organizing framework, since it is what drove the decisions about content of the survey.

6. At the end of the literature review, please state the purpose of the study. Remove settings from the literature review (see recommendation #10).

Methods


8. In the description of the sample, it would help to know how many women gave birth at each hospital and in each midwifery practice, and the percentage of each who completed the questionnaire. This would be preferable to the estimates provides by the midwives and obstetricians.
9. The three items in the Expectancy/Experience questionnaire used to measure control had an unacceptably low Cronbach’s alpha, which is not surprising, since the items only measured one aspect of control. But this introduces serious measurement error. Please address this problem.

10. I am confused about the categorization of policlinic and birth clinics as hospital and home, respectively. I think that restricting the analysis to only those who chose hospital or home (and not some in-between variant) would introduce less threat of bias. Alternatively, provide a much more solid justification for their categorization.

Results

11. Means should not be reported without their standard deviations.

12. I am not an expert on hierarchical linear modeling, but the results seem to be overstated, given that many of the relationships are weak. Statistical significance should not be confused with clinical significance.

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. I do not understand the last sentence of the Background.

2. In the Literature Review, section on expectations: what is meant by “Expectations refer to a role system”?

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

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

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

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare I have no competing interests.