Reviewer's report

Title: Satisfaction with childbirth in Belgium and the Netherlands

Version: 1 Date: 2 May 2007

Reviewer: Paul Hewson

Reviewer's report:

General

I think this is an interesting and very well conducted study, and addresses a really important topic.

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

My only comments are in relation to the presentation of the analysis.

The presentation of statistical results needs a little attention before it meets modern standards. For example, results should be quoted with a confidence interval. For example, I wish to know whether the confidence intervals for age of the two nationalities of women differs (you quote a mean of 30.4 and 31.9).

The difference between the two in terms of levels of higher education needs looking at very carefully. My first question is whether there is some difference in definitions of higher education?

It is the potential for confounding that most interests me throughout this paper.

I see that 68.8 of Belgian women felt the experience met expectations, whereas for Dutch women the figure was 61.1 percent. Again, without confidence intervals I have no way of telling whether or not this is significant, but far more importantly, I am immediately curious as to whether the expectation relates to education levels or nationality, and of course there is strong confounding between nation and education levels.

When you next tell us that for "45.0% of the primiparae, reality of birth differed from their expectations, compared with 28.7% of the multiparae" I am getting more and more curious about confounding, as there were notable differences (10 percentage points) between first and subsequent deliveries when comparing the two nations.

Whilst I appreciate that some descriptive summaries are important at this stage, I feel perhaps they should be tabulated and the comments kept to a minimum, as conclusions are dangerous until you have accounted for all the confounding.

For me, the way to really understand the confounding is by means of the hierarchical models, and that part of your work needs expanding and setting out more carefully to this end. I really would like to see your model carefully specified, in enough detail for a reader to replicate the analysis with their own data if they so wished. Personally, I prefer to see a formula for the models you are fitting. Whilst you mention that you used SPSS, you give no references for the methodology you have used, or citations to similar work. Is it appropriate to use the "standard" model, assuming Gaussian responses for the kind of satisfaction data you are attempting to model, or should you use some form of ordinal regression here? As per earlier comments, it is useful (standard?) to report coefficients with confidence intervals, and I would really like to see some reassurance that you have made a number of checks for model fit - it wasn't clear to me how much better models fitted with interaction terms than without, and it wasn't clear which interaction terms you had considered and why.

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

I'm always uncomfortable whenever someone presents data on a number of "correlations". In particular, you are reporting correlations less than 0.3, sometimes a lot less. Does this really tell us much - what do the
scatter plots tell you about the strength of the relationships between these variables. I am particularly uncomfortable when these are being estimated in the presence of a number of known confounding factors, and think it makes much more sense to report association in terms of the model coefficients from a model which takes into account confounding and so on.

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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 of outstanding merit and interest in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I have no competing interests.