Reviewer's report

**Title:** The early postnatal period: exploring women’s views, expectations and experiences of care using focus groups in Victoria, Australia

**Version:** 2  **Date:** 12 February 2008

**Reviewer:** Susan Watt

**Reviewer's report:**

The review is organized according to the questions provided for reviewers on the website:

1. For a small qualitative study the issues are adequately defined.
2. I believe that there is a methodological problem with collecting information from women at different stages in their pregnancies about on both expectations and experiences in the same focus group (particularly since there is strong evidence that expectations are set by things like past experience, social class, ongoing professional relationships, etc). There is a "contamination" issue that arises by mixing the group membership. The questions later appear to have been more about the gap between expectations and experiences than about either independently. These issues should be clearer in the article. Given a reasonable literature in the field, I was a bit surprised at the "exploratory" nature of the study. The literature from Sweden, Canada, and the US provides quite adequate documentation of the expectations of women about childbirth, the antenatal period, and about postpartum care. For example, 1st time moms are well known to experience more/higher levels of anxiety about breastfeeding and infant care than are women with more than one child. Is there some argument that women in Australia would have had different expectations or experiences therefore creating the need for a more exploratory approach?

3. The authors report and highly structured and rigorous qualitative methodology for analyzing the focus group data. However it is impossible to know whether the information relates to first time mothers (the majority of the participants) or to the group as a whole. Despite this problem the authors draw conclusions in the discussion (e.g., paragraph 4) that distinguish primaparous from multiparous moms. This is again where a mixed methods approach would have yielded clearer and more informative results. This issue needs resolution before publication.

4. The format is fine.

5. See comments in section 3. Generally the discussion pushes the results as far as is reasonable and in some instances a bit beyond.

6. The limitations are clear.

7. Yes

8. Yes.
9. Yes.

It is my opinion that this paper needs some Compulsory Revisions which address the methodological and reporting issues identified above. In addition, it would be helpful for the authors to clearly articulate what this research adds to our understanding of this event/period in the lives of mother, or in relation to the policies about length of postpartum stay, or to clinical practice with this client group.

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 limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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.