Reviewer's report

Title: Women's experience of maternity care services

Version: 1 Date: 3 September 2008

Reviewer: Wendy Christiaens

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Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Title and abstract

The title is too general. In my opinion it should include key words such as care path and or satisfaction with or evaluation of maternity care. Also a reference to the Netherlands would be appropriate.

In the methods section of the abstract, the authors should add how long after delivery the second survey has been administered.

2. Introduction

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3. Methods

Second paragraph, is this sample spread over the Netherlands or concentrated in one area?

Third paragraph, how were the composite measures constructed? Did the author run a factor analysis? How many items were used per measure? Or is there a reference, where the readers interested in this matter can find more information?

4. Results

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5. Discussion

First paragraph, last line, “This breach in continuity may have influenced their evaluation on the care they received.” This sentence needs a reference. The authors could refer to the literature about the importance of continuity of care(giver) in midwifery, or other empirical findings about the adverse effects of referrals/transfers, to support their statement. (e.g. Green, J.M., Renfrew, M.J. & Curtis, P.A. (2000) Continuity of carer: what matters to women? A review of the evidence. Midwifery 16, 186-196).

Second paragraph, “The composite measures for treatment in different settings .... Results show that women, regardless of parity or care path, were very
positive about the maternity care they received.” Does this mean that referrals do not lower evaluations? How can this be connected with other empirical findings regarding the effect of referrals on maternal satisfaction about care (e.g. Van der Hulst, L. A. M., van Teijlingen, E., Bonsel, G. J., Eskes, M., Birnie, E., & Bleker, O. Dutch women’s decision-making in pregnancy and labour as seen through the eyes of their midwives. Midwifery and Christiaens, W., Gouwy, A. & Bracke, P. (2007) Does a referral from home to hospital affect satisfaction with childbirth? A cross-national comparison. Bmc Health Services Research 7)? Does this finding contradict earlier findings? How could this be explained?

Fourth paragraph, “The influence of deviations from the expected and straight forward care path turned out to be much larger.” This finding could be supported by reference to other empirical findings regarding the discrepancy between childbirth experiences and expectations.

The discussion part, and the paper in general, would benefit from:

• The integration of findings from other research. In spite of a large literature about the evaluation of maternity care (also satisfaction with childbirth), the paper counts very little references.
• A discussion of the strengths, and especially weaknesses of this study
• The consequences for the Dutch gatekeeper system and the practice of health professionals
• Key findings should be more emphasized.

Minor Essential Revisions

1. Title and abstract
The results section of the abstract contains small language problems:
e.g. “all but two percent of women had …”
e.g. on average…. , with no relation to parity. “Of the women” can be deleted.

2. Introduction
Language problems in:
First paragraph of background section: “In the Netherlands NIVEL developed in the 1990s …. , based on what is regarded to be important by clients, to be taken into account in ….”
Second paragraph of background section: “This is very well sums up our intentions…. ”

3. Methods
Third paragraph, there are some brackets missing in the first lines.
Third paragraph, perhaps the Cronbach’s alpha’s could be reported for each composite measure, by means of a reference point for other researchers, using
similar measures.

4. Results

5. Discussion

Third paragraph, first sentence, language error, “due to” and “because of” in one sentence. Comma at the end, instead of “.”.

Discretionary Revisions

Results

A graphical representation (e.g. kind of flow chart) would enhance the readability of the paragraph describing the care path.

Tables and Figures

In table 3, it is clear that especially nulliparous women plan to give birth in hospital with own midwife, but end up giving birth in hospital with a gynecologist. This is an interesting finding, which could be mentioned. Is this in accordance with other Dutch tendencies? (e.g. Van der Hulst, L. A. M., van Teijlingen, E., Bonsel, G. J., Eskes, M., Birnie, E., & Bleker, O. Dutch women's decision-making in pregnancy and labour as seen through the eyes of their midwives. Midwifery).

Table 4: how do some of these figures compare with national statistics?

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**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'