Reviewer's report

Title: Maternal well-being and its association to risk of developmental problems in children at school entry

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Reviewer: Susan Dickstein

Reviewer's report:

This paper, “Maternal well-being and its association to risk of developmental problems in children at school entry” extends a series of previously published articles based on the Community Perinatal Care Study, a longitudinal investigation following a cohort of women from pregnancy until their children were of school age. Specifically, this report examined concurrent and predictive (from 3 years of age) factors associated with poor outcomes of children at 5 years of age. A strength of this work is the comprehensive study design that allows for prospective longitudinal analysis of outcomes, accounting for previous conditions.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Defining the problem.
   • In general, the introduction was vague, emphasizing societal benefits and consequences of early identification of risk for later developmental problems. A brief discussion at this level might be warranted, but seems quite broad and well beyond the scope of the study aims and data collected. The introduction needs to better review the (relatively abundant) scientific literature on early risk factors (such as maternal mental health problems, poverty, limited prenatal care) as related to child outcomes, in general, as well as to the specific study questions at hand.
   • It would be important to not only identify the specific questions/hypotheses to be addressed in this current paper, but also describe how this current work builds on and is distinct from what has already been reported from the larger study. It would be important (and quite interesting) to clearly elucidate the questions that this study may address above and beyond those in the 3 year follow up.
   • Further, there was minimal discussion in the introduction about hypotheses related to the impact of intervention (groups randomized to 3 different types of prenatal care) on outcomes.

2. Sample Characteristics.
   • The 5 year cohort seems to be a low-risk sample. This should be addressed with respect to fit with theoretical justification and specific aims of the paper. Research related to multiple risk models may be useful.
   • The 5 year cohort (n=491) is significantly different from the 3 year cohort
(n=791) on several reported factors; do the authors have some understanding for why the highest risk families were lost to the study? (Are either of these cohorts different from the original n=1737?) As stated in the discussion, this has implications for generalization, but might also be informative about study design.

3. Data Analysis/Results.

• Please clarify the meaning of the “paths” (p.11) and the rationale for conducting analyses in this manner. (It seems that this might be for the purpose of predicting developmental vs behavioral/mental health outcomes based on individual child and maternal characteristics; this agenda was not justified in the introduction).

• Similarly, (p.13) the association among risk factors over time for mothers yielded potentially interesting information, but this was a) not indicated as a specific aim of this paper; and b) not linked to child outcomes.

• Analyses do not address the fact that the sample is comprised of families randomized into 3 groups. How did this factor into the results?

• It would be important to explain the reasons for the different sample sizes used for various analyses (e.g., Table 1 total n=491; Table 2 total n=490; Table 3 total n=477).

4. Limitations/Conclusions

• This section was well written and described implications of the study findings, including relevant limitations.

• Given that this current work is part of a larger study with previously published papers, it would be helpful to clearly elucidate how this paper extends our knowledge and understanding of the subject matter beyond the 3 year follow up.

Discretionary Revisions

1. Participant characteristics are described both at the start of the Methods section and the start of the Results section; I might suggest combining this information in one place.

2. Other than the PEDS, I am not familiar with the questionnaires used (p.8); additional information about the measures (including scales) would be helpful.

3. On Tables 2 and 3, if p values are set a priori at <.05, there is no need to include a p-value column (the statistic is either significant or not).

**Level of interest:** An article of importance 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 declare that I have no competing interests