Reviewer's report

Title: Prevalence of Childhood Disability and the Characteristics and Circumstances of Disabled Children in the UK: Secondary Analysis of the Family Resources Survey

Version: 1 Date: 26 October 2009

Reviewer: Eric Emerson

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting and generally well-written paper that addresses an important issue; the prevalence and characteristics of disabled children in the UK. It could, however, be substantially improved by addressing the following points.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The results of the study should be discussed within the context of the available literature. This should include discussion (or at least some reference to a number of recent reports commissioned by DCSF on the measurement of disability) and, in particular, Emerson, E., & Hatton, C. (2007). The socio-economic circumstances of children at risk of disability in Britain. Disability & Society 22(6), 563-80. While an unpublished report by these authors is cited in the discussion, there are some significant similarities between the presented study and the Emerson/Hatton that warrant discussion as both were based on secondary analysis of large nationally representative samples drawn from the UK.

2. I cannot make sense of the median equivalised income data presented in Table 3. It does not match with the description given on page 11 and shows some anomalous findings. For example: (a) for white/other groups median income is greater in households containing a disabled child; (b) for BMEC households a 1GBP difference in median income is very nearly statistically significant!

Minor Essential Revisions

3. Please report then number of households in which the 16,012 children lived (p7).

4. Given the cross-sectional nature of these data, it would be more appropriate to discuss associations rather than impact (cf., p8)

5. There is a word missing (indicator?) at the end of the first line on p9.

6. Describe exactly how the strength of association was tested when reducing variables (p9). Was housing tenure chosen on this basis? If so, that is somewhat surprising.

7. Please report 95% confidence intervals for all prevalence estimates.
8. Please report measures of effect sizes (e.g., odds ratios, gamma, r) and tests of statistical significance (including test name and statistics, not just p values) for all comparisons (including in tables).

9. The multivariate analyses presented in Table 3 need clarifying. Was the unit of analysis households or children? If the latter, then the clustering of children within households needs to be taken into account by multilevel modelling.

Discretionary Revisions

10. ‘Single parent’ is preferable (to some) to ‘lone parent’ (p10)

11. One of the more interesting findings of the Emerson/Hatton paper was that between-group differences in deprivation persisted when controlling for between-group differences in equivalised household income. It would be interesting to see if FRS analyses gave similar results.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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'