Reviewer's report

Title: Factors associated with breastfeeding cessation in nursing mothers in a peer support programme in Eastern Lancashire

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Reviewer: Ann DiGirolamo

Reviewer's report:

This manuscript provides some potentially important information relevant to audiences interested in promoting breastfeeding practices, particularly in the UK. However, currently the manuscript is difficult to read and to follow, and could benefit from refining and clarifying the objectives of the paper, and following this line throughout into the abstract, results and discussion. In addition, given the large number of cases with missing data on the outcome variable of breastfeeding duration (53.6%) and the method used to estimate duration, this reviewer is not clear that a continuous outcome of breastfeeding duration and the proposed statistical methods are appropriate. A statistician should review this and comment. In revising the manuscript, the authors should consider the following:

• Major Compulsory Revisions

1) One of the highlights and important additions of this manuscript is the peer support programme which the introduction notes is a strategy suggested to increase breastfeeding duration. In reading the introduction, one expects this to be a focus of the analysis and the paper. However, it is only given very brief mention, is not part of the analysis, and in the discussion, the authors state that the effectiveness of peer support programmes in improving breastfeeding outcomes is supported by their study, with no further explanation as to how their results support this. I am not clear that the results of this study really address this issue, except that the study results apply only to these mothers who were part of the program—but there is no direct comparison group. The objectives of this study and the relevant results and discussion need to be clarified both in the text and in the abstract.

2) Several predictor variables were considered for the study (Table 1); however little, if any, information is given in the introduction as to why these variables were chosen. Please also provide more information in the Methods on the variables of interest...for example, what exactly do you mean by infant feeding patterns (i.e., specific variables in Table 4 are not mentioned previously), etc. This section could be organized more clearly.

3) As noted above, I am not clear, given the large amount of missing data on dates of cessation (53.6%) and the method used to estimate the duration, that using the mean and median of breastfeeding duration as the main outcome
measures and the use of hazards ratios and survival analysis are appropriate—in estimating you lose a lot of precision in the duration variable and have gathered these data in different ways. You discuss the likelihood of mothers’ breastfeeding cessation based on various demographic and hospital factors, but when does cessation occur? Perhaps a more appropriate method, given the data that are available, may be to look at the dichotomous outcomes of breastfeeding cessation at 6 weeks, 17 weeks, and 6 months to see which factors are associated with each of these outcomes, using logistic regression. Again, a statistician may be able to comment more on these issues, and I suggest consulting with one regarding the use of these data to address your study objectives.

4) I found the layout and description of the results somewhat confusing—jumping around a bit. In Table 2, need to clarify that the p-value relates to analyses conducted for differences in demographic and delivery variables by site. Value of reporting both the mean and median (especially given above comments)? The section and heading of “effects of the factors” is vague—also please be consistent in your reporting of the results (i.e., compared with Indian mothers, White mothers were 89% more likely to stop breastfeeding; compared with Blacks, they were 2.9 times more likely…). How does the information in Table 4 fit in with the overall objectives? In several places, the authors state, “after adjustment” in reference to Table 5; please be clear what you have adjusted for…all variables listed on the left?

5) The discussion is also somewhat unfocused and jumps around. What is the study’s main message? How does this fit with prior literature and what are the public health implications? As noted above, I am not convinced that the current study supports the effectiveness of peer support programmes in improving breastfeeding—this is not really addressed with the current design of the study. Please be clearer in describing what you mean by “routine data” and the potential limitations associated with this. I think a major limitation is the amount of missing data on the outcome variable which the authors allude to. Finally, I question the authors’ conclusion that effects of maternal ethnicity, parity, and in-hospital infant feeding practices on breastfeeding outcomes may be more difficult to influence by peer support interventions and may need to be specifically targeted—how and why?? I think this may be somewhat stretching the results from the current study, with it being difficult to reach this conclusion about the influence of peer support interventions from the data shown without having some type of true comparison or control group and more information about the peer support program, its components, and potential effects. The conclusion in the abstract is more fitting for the study’s reported results. Here is where some clarity on the specific objectives of the current study would be helpful.

• Minor Essential Revisions

1) Please number the pages—difficult to follow without this.

2) Please state why ethical approval was not required for the use of these data.
3) Throughout the manuscript there are several areas with awkward sentences or in need of grammatical correction. For example, throughout “data was” should be “data were;” “socio-economic status of the mothers was obtained…;” “there is no consistent evidence;” “Recent evidence has suggested;” etc. Please reread and check for consistency of tense, singular vs. plural verbs, proper prepositions, etc, and revise accordingly.

- Discretionary Revisions

1) In the Results, additional headings would be helpful. For example, the first section could be Demographic Characteristics of the Sample. The section on breastfeeding duration could include overall information and then information by demographic characteristics, followed by hospital practices, with possible subheadings. It would be helpful to have the information on exclusive breastfeeding, etc in a separate section with an appropriate heading. And to better define the heading, “The effects of the factors.”

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

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

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.