Reviewer's report

Title: Predictors of Exclusive Breast Feeding: Observations from the Alberta Pregnancy Outcomes and Nutrition (APrON) study

Version: 1 Date: 15 November 2012

Reviewer: Robert Locke

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1. The solid scientific thought process and valuable public health information contained in this study is obscured by poor written communication. There are paragraphs that are nearly undecipherable. The findings of the study could be explained in a much more coherent manner. Before the manuscript can be recommended for acceptance, review by someone with strong scientific writing skills would seem necessary. The following author queries and suggestions may reflect a misunderstanding of areas that the authors have inadequately communicated.

2. With clarifications of the following scientific questions and a major editing of the written results section, this manuscript would probably be of interest to BMC for publication.

Major Revisions

1. Writing: Please clean up the entire manuscript. The most difficult section to decipher was the results section, beginning with the first two paragraphs. This is basic descriptive data that should be easy to follow in written or graph form. This was not the case. Please be clear in your writing when using percentages whether referring to an absolute percentage decrease or a proportional decrease by the percentage listed.

Questions to the author by manuscript order:

Introduction:

1. Aim of the study: “the relationship between parental/infant characteristics and exclusive breastfeeding..” Maternal characteristics are described in the study. However, it seems like a stretch to state that the study evaluated paternal characteristics or infant characteristics. What paternal characteristics were studied? Was the IIFAS given to the fathers? Was the health status and feeding characteristics of the infant examined? Would recommend that the authors change “parental” to maternal characteristics. Similar problems exist later in the manuscript.

Methods:

1. Need to expand upon the “Child Food and Liquid Intake” and Food Frequency Questionnaire (FFQ) questionnaire introduced on line 172. Is this a validated
questionnaire? What are its components? Have these been evaluated for the effect of recall or intent-to-answer-to-please bias?

2. The adherence to good statistical modeling practices is appreciated and well-written throughout the manuscript.

Results:
1. See above comments on the writing. It took a considerable amount of effort to understand what was being described. Figures 2 and 3 were readily understandable, but when reading the descriptions it became confusing. For example, in the sentence, “...36.3% of infants in the complementary/replacement feeding category (37.5%) received infant formula...”, to what does the 37.5% refer?

2. Parental socio-demographic and health:
3. Understandably there is a selection bias within the study inclusion and recruitment process. Clarifying

4. How this study population compares to the Alberta general population of 16 – 40 year old mothers would help the reader understand how the findings of this study can be generalized to the larger population.

5. Maternal infant feeding and knowledge:
6. This was interesting and a key value of the manuscript.

7. **Was there an analysis to what degree a high IIFAS score could provide protection against other factors that are both fixed (lower educational status) or modifiable (introduction of complementary foods)? This would be an interesting analysis that has potential public health intervention strategy implications.

8. How was the 40-item Food Frequency Questionnaire used in the results section?

Discussion
The manuscript does not provide a “comprehensive list of potential paternal…and infant factors”. If this statement is going to remain, referencing fathers and infants, further support needs to be provided that is what was studied. In contrast, there is good information for maternal factors.

The limitations of the study are clearly presented and helpful to reader

Line 455 – was that proven for the survey tools of your study?

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

**Quality of written English:** Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

**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. – Robert Locke