Reviewer's report

Title: Predictors of the early introduction of solid foods in infants: results of a cohort study

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Reviewer: Daniel W Sellen

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The paper provides new information that is potentially helpful in understanding the mismatch observed in most populations between recommendations for the timing of introduction of solid foods and actual caregiver practices. It therefore contributes to understanding of an important public health issue that has received less attention than the initiation and maintenance of breastfeeding, but is relevant to support and promotion of exclusive breastfeeding and the continuing need for a strong evidence base on which to base recommendations for the timing of key transitions in the process of infant and young child feeding. The study design and statistical analysis appear to be well conducted and well presented and the paper is well written and will be of interest in the field. Other strengths are the testing for an association between timing of introduction of solids and duration of BF (such tests are still relatively few in the literature), the attempt to link epidemiological patterns with proximate motivational indicators, a good summary of the relevant literature, and the raising of important further issues in the discussion, such as the need for standardization of indicators of the timing of introduction of foods other than breast milk. A potential weakness is a lack of control for the previous infant feeding practices and experience of multiparas and exposure to different sorts of health care provider support (in addition to the national messaging).

Suggestions for discretionary improvement are to address briefly in the discussion two questions raised by the findings:

(i) Can we know more about the possibilities for retention bias? Although individuals lost to follow up are similar in age and education to those retained in the study, it remains possible that likelihood of follow up be linked to infant feeding intentions/ constraints, e.g. level of household support, constraints on allocation to work and caregiving?

(ii) How might being younger translate to a hungrier infant or a greater perception of hunger in the infant? Findings include a statistical link better younger maternal age and earlier introduction, and also perceived infant interest/hunger as a cue to which caregivers respond; but these are not considered together in the discussion. If there is no underlying causal link, could there be unmeasured factors at work, such as younger mums have greater expectation or pressures to introduce solids and earlier, perhaps to facilitate return to work? Such might also alter perceptions of milk insufficiency as previous work has suggested.
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