Reviewer’s report

Title: Postnatal depression in Southern Brazil: prevalence and its demographic and socioeconomic determinants

Version: 1 Date: 21 May 2007
Reviewer: Jane Fisher

Reviewer’s report:

General

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

The revised manuscript is considerably improved. The finding of an association between poverty and maternal depression makes a valuable contribution to the literature about the determinants of perinatal mental health in low income countries.

There are however, a number of matters which have not yet been addressed, but which in my opinion are necessary.

1. Although a description of the population size and average per capita income in Porto Alegre has been provided, there is still little description of the cultural context and setting in which the study has been conducted. In particular, there is no description of the equity of women’s access to education and employment; literacy levels, the perinatal health services available to women and the proportion who give birth in a medical setting and a general statement about standard of living. Although the paper no longer claims in its title to be addressing cultural factors, in my opinion these are essential to enable international readers to envisage the setting in which the study was conducted.

2. The data base from which this sample was drawn has been described. However, it is not clear to me what a selection “process of pseudo random numbers” means and this requires elaboration. The means by which selected participants were approached and consent to participate was obtained are now clear. It appears that the study was described in the public media a month before data collection began, but there is no report of whether participants were actually aware of this when the home visits were made. In my opinion some comment needs to be made about the acceptability to participants of unsolicited home visits for research purposes. Given the apparently high recruitment rate and that up to three visits were made to each mother; comment needs to be made about whether women were actually free to refuse to participate. I think the term “recruited” is more accurate than “investigated” to describe the number who participated (p12).

3. The rationale for the sample size is now much clearer. However, the use of the terms ‘drop out’ (p12) and ‘attrition’ (p16) imply that this is a longitudinal study, which it is not. These are inaccurate descriptors and the term recruitment rate needs to be used instead.

4. I remain concerned that ethnicity appears to have been assigned on the basis of skin colour “white, black, yellow, native, mixed”. It is still not clear how skin colour was established or what it is thought to be an indicator of. If it is to be used, then some explanation needs to be provided for how ethnicity is established by skin colour in Brazil.

5. The strengths and limitations of the study need to be presented at the beginning of the Discussion, rather than in the Conclusions. Although there is appropriate discussion of the impact of poverty on maternal mental health, there is still no engagement with the contribution of gendered restrictions to women’s poverty. Equity of access to education and secure employment promote autonomy in women as well as increasing their standard of living. Although some established risk factors for depression after childbirth were investigated, others, in particular quality of intimate partner relationship, exposure to abuse, availability of instrumental and emotional support, reproductive health and infant health were not, which imposes some limitation on interpretation of findings. These may have contributed to the low uptake of the treatment intervention that was offered and need to be acknowledged and discussed.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

**What next?:** Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

**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