Reviewer's report

Title: Children's oral health outcomes in a public health program to encourage low income pregnant women to utilize dental care

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Reviewer: Rosamund Harrison

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This paper is an outcomes assessment that compares the dental caries status of 2-year old children whose mothers participated in a prenatal dental program that emphasized utilization of dental services to caries status of a comparison group of children. Initial results on caries status are promising. The paper emphasizes the importance of a program that focuses on mothers as well as on their offspring.

Minor Essential Revisions

1. Title: The title is somewhat misleading because “oral health” goes beyond “caries status” even in preschool children. It should allude to “dental caries status” or at least “dental health status” rather than the more global term “oral health outcomes”. Perhaps the title could be a something like “Dental caries status of children whose mothers participated in a prenatal dental program.”

2. While these authors have done previous important research on access to care for low income moms and tots, they are not the only researchers to who have done such work. Five out of 9 references were to the authors’ own work; the authors are agreeing with themselves. Including 2 or 3 published articles by other researchers in this area of study [rather than the authors own papers] is easily doable.

3. The style of writing is terse and expedient [which is fine] but sometimes the expedience gets in the way of clarity and understanding. Another round of editing is recommended.

Examples;

Background: para 3: “A community-based public health program to provide a dental home” could be “A community-based public health program providing a dental home”

Methods/setting: The tense changes from present to past

Methods/participants: para 1 “The first group consisted a sample” should be “The first group consisted of a sample of”

Methods/examinations: the two examiners are identified (Shirtcliff and Woll). We know who Shirtcliff is, but who is Woll? Also, while dental health researchers reading this paper may be familiar with the WHO criteria, others in public health may not. Perhaps a sentence explaining what “decayed” actually means as per
WHO would be helpful. For example, were only frank cavitations counted as decay?

Results:

“The Klamath children were half boys and girls” What is a “half boy?”

4. Throughout the paper the authors state that what they have done is a program evaluation; in fact, they have only assessed outcomes not evaluated the program’s process, impact and outcomes. Program evaluation is a systematic method for collecting, analyzing and using information to answer basic questions about projects, policies and programs [Administration for Children and Families (2006) The Program Manager’s Guide to Evaluation. Chapter 2: What is program evaluation?]

The term program evaluation should be changed to outcomes assessment. It is unfortunate that many authors feel the need to almost apologise for “program evaluation” and suggest that only a rigorous experiment, i.e. a RCT is true research. Program evaluation has a respected place in public health research and has no need to be “downgraded” to something of lesser value. However, this paper is not a comprehensive program evaluation anyway; it is an outcomes assessment or, at least more specifically, is an “outcomes-based program evaluation.”

**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:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have not competing interests.