Reviewer’s report

Title: The influence of both individual and area based socioeconomic status on temporal trends in Caesarean sections in Scotland 1980-2000

Version: 1 Date: 7 November 2010

Reviewer: Alison Macfarlane

Reviewer’s report:

I am glad to see this analysis has now been submitted for publication. I was aware of the work, having seen it as a conference presentation, and it is important because it considers caesarean section rates in relation to both social class and area deprivation scores. Although it is an important and high quality analysis which is well worth publishing, there are some issues which I think should be explained or clarified.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. It is not explained why women who had emergency caesarean sections were excluded from the denominator for elective sections. It could be argued that as decisions to do elective sections are usually taken before labour and some are taken with the aim of avoiding emergency sections, that the analysis should be done the other way with women having elective sections to be excluded from the denominator for emergency sections.

2. An explanation is needed of occasions when father’s occupations are not recorded at birth registration. Does this apply to all births outside marriage, or just to sole registrations, as in England? How many of these forms did not have mothers’ occupations either? As the RG’s social classes were constructed in relation to men’s occupations, there are question about whether associations between women’s social classes and adverse outcomes are hierarchical. Finally, can the authors reassure us that there is no numerator-denominator bias in the ‘undetermined’ group?

3. A fuller discussion is needed of the extent to which the variables included in the analysis accounted for the substantial differences between Health Boards and, by implication, between maternity units. It would be useful to see fuller data on this. This aspect should also form part of the conclusions.

4. In the conclusions in both the abstract and the main text, the word ‘favouring’ is used. This implies some sort of value judgement about caesarean section, yet the authors cite papers giving very different views on the subject. These conclusions should be phrased differently.

Discretionary Revisions

1. At the bottom of Table 1, it would be helpful to see the numbers of births excluded because of missing data.
2. It is some time now since 2000, the final year of the analysis. I presume that even if the first author had not left Glasgow, she would have been unable to update the analysis because of the change from RG’s social class to the NS-Sec. A brief mention of this would be useful, along with comments about what impact this change might have on the conclusions. Perhaps it is time for a second paper, covering the period from 2001 onwards?

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.