Reviewer's report

**Title:** Public Health Interventions in Midwifery: a systematic review of systematic reviews

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 21 August 2012

**Reviewer:** Jane Barlow

**Reviewer's report:**

This is an important systematic review on a topic of considerable interest. The review has, on the whole been conducted with rigour and is well-written. However, I have a number of concerns about the findings as follows:

1. I have found the failure to report the evidence about what does not work rather unsatisfactory. For example, one of the key public health interventions that midwives have used to date is antenatal education classes. Gagnon (2005) did a fantastic meta-analysis showing that this form of education is not effective. Surely, midwives will be confused as to why the section on ANE only refers to PMFT, and they also need to know that ANE doesn't work so that they do not waste further time and effort in that area. I spent rather a long time trying to work out why some topics and studies were just not mentioned at all.

2. I am a bit confused about how the quality ratings were used in terms of decisions about whether to include or exclude reviews:
   a) The review states clearly that only reviews based on RCTs were included but what about reviews that included wide-ranging study designs and then reported the RCT findings separately or as part of a meta-analysis? This review appears to have excluded these.
   b) Were all reviews meeting the above RCT criterion included or only reviews that were then rated also as high quality. Where is the quality rating reported...and how is that used to modify the assessment of the findings.

3. I am unclear as to why some reviews have been included and not others. For example, in the section on postnatal mental health the authors appear to have included a systematic review of parenting programmes that is not focused on any aspect of the perinatal period and should undoubtedly not have been included in the current review, while making no reference whatsoever to the NICE 2007 review, presumably because it included some studies that were not RCTs. I really don't see how a review of mental health interventions in pregnancy cannot include the NICE 2007 guidance! Similarly, reviews of smoking cessation programmes in pregnancy which are included under 'support' rather than 'education' includes two reviews, but does not reference Melvin (2000) or Park (2004) or the Rubak (2005) meta-analysis of alcohol reduction during pregnancy. Breastfeeding support during pregnancy isn't mentioned but Renfrew (2005) reviewed existing reviews (were none of these eligible) and the Dyson (2005)
review must surely have been eligible. What about Kangaroo care (Moore 2007), parenting programmes for children 0-3 years (Barlow et al 2004); parental sensitivity (Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2003) (the results for RCTs are presented separately).

I think that if the authors are intent on only publishing positive findings, they need to clearly state what evidence was not included in each section, and why, so that readers can be clear about why some reviews were not included, and indeed, why some topics were not included.

4. A good starting point for this review would have been the Barlow et al (2008) review of health-led parenting interventions in pregnancy (DfE website) (also published in 2010 in Child and Adolescent Mental Health). The current review would then have needed to make clear what it was adding to what is already known on this topic.

4. The background section is rather thin on references particularly for the first paragraph and the references for second part are not well used. For example, refs 7 and 8 are really poor references for the importance of parenting in the early years. In fact reference 9 would have been better, and the NICE 2007 review used as reference instead for perintal mental health.

**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