Reviewer's report

Title: The National Women's Health Study: methods and description of the study population

Version: 1 Date: 1 March 2004

Reviewer: Eva Alberman

Reviewer's report:

General

1. This is a potentially very useful research tool and should provide much needed population based reproductive information on questions such as the prevalence of miscarriages at different ages; prevalence of, and outcomes after, assisted reproduction history, and patterns of reproduction within sibships.
2. It is unfortunate that in more recent years the 'opt-out' clause now means that one can no longer sample from the total electoral register, so that this tool may not be available for more recent times. Ideally one would wish to repeat such a survey regularly. However this in no way invalidates the current findings.
3. The poor response rate at Stage 1 is a cause for concern, but probably inevitable, although the demonstration of the likely validity of the final sample was reassuring.
4. The introduction of a probabilistic process using forenames to reduce the likelihood of sampling women aged more than 55 is attractive. Can the authors give us any indication of how successful this was?

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

None

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

None

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

1. Include definitions of the terms 'miscarriage'; 'missed miscarriage'; 'blighted ova'; and 'termination for medical reasons' (and for non-medical reasons).
2. Explain the significance of the term 'offsetting the log odds of the population risk' when calculating standardised values.
3. Explain the distinction between a multiple birth and a singleton birth when one twin is technically a miscarriage. Presumably the concern is to use the definitions used by national statistics.

What next?: Accept after discretionary revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field
Quality of written English: Acceptable
Statistical review: No