Reviewer's report

Title: Council Tax Valuation Band predicts breast feeding and socio-economic status in the Alspac study population.

Version: 1 Date: 6 September 2005

Reviewer: Judith Lumley

Reviewer's report:

General
The paper describes associations between Council Tax Valuation Band – which is a measure of individual house property value and amenities developed in the UK as a basis for local tax levies, and:

? breastfeeding in the first month after birth;
? measures of maternal and paternal education, ‘mother’s family income’ in pregnancy, maternal smoking, maternal social class, and measures of housing quality;
using data collected in the ALSPAC study.

The strength of the paper is the evidence that the CTVB is a very useful measure of household socio-economic status at the time of family formation. This adds to earlier evidence that it performs well in the other contexts for which this group has used it.

---------------------------------------------------------------------

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

Table 4 not sure that this is helpful as it stands, the test for trend does not give enough information about the differential associations between CTVB and the personal or socioeconomic factor.

4. The actual research question was not really explicit: the premise in the Background of the Abstract was that the relationship between maternal socioeconomic status and breastfeeding was ill-defined whereas my understanding of the data was that in the UK as in many other similar countries in the last 25 years there was a very clear relationship of lower breastfeeding initiation and duration among women with a lower family income, fewer years of education, or women not living with a partner. (Mi)

5. The Abstract/Methods describe this as a prospective study when it is a retrospective analysis of a sample of the data collected in 1991-2 as part of the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children. The sample was a random sample rather than - as described – a randomised subset. The list of ‘outcome measures’ in the abstract includes attitudes, intentions ‘perinatal circumstances’ maternal attributes etc. (Mi)

6. The use of the term ‘predicts’ in the Results is also inappropriate as are:

? …in CTVB E+ the rate is 57%, intervening rates climbing progressively
? Such influence is consistent through the first postnatal month
? CTVB also predicts with high levels of statistical significance maternal social class, home conditions, parental educational attainment, family income and smoking (Mi)

7. Reference 4 is misquoted as it demonstrates marked differences between general practices with respect to breastfeeding duration, which not explained by practice population deprivation score (Jarman). High-quality evidence on the benefits of breastfeeding is available from the PROBIT
cluster-randomised trial (Kramer M, Chalmers B et al), which would be a more appropriate reference than Reference 6 an RCP/FPHM document of 10 years ago. (Mi)

8. Method line 1.. randomised again used inappropriately (Mi)

9. Results perceived bottle feeding convenience is probably a key belief since it is relevant to going anywhere without the baby, and to breastfeeding in public (latter reported as being quite difficult to do in the UK)

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)

1 Table 1 information could be incorporated into one of the other Tables. (D)

2. Table 3 would be more informative if the relative risks and confidence intervals for not breastfeeding at all, not fully breastfed on day 1, on day 2-6, in week 2, week 3 and week 4 were shown instead of the numbers of women, as the latter can be readily calculated from the numbers and percentages provided for those who are breastfeeding at all, on first day of life etc (D)

3. Another paper on breastfeeding using the ALSPAC cohort has provided stronger evidence about the relative importance of breastfeeding intentions and maternal smoking on breastfeeding duration (Donath S, Amir A, ALSPAC study team. The relation between maternal smoking and breastfeeding duration after adjustment for maternal feeding intention. Acta Paediatrica 2004; 93(11): 1514-8. (D)

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

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I have no competing interests.

6th September 2005