Reviewer's report

Title: Effect of an antepartum Pap smear on the coverage of a cervical cancer screening programme: a population-based prospective study

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Reviewer: Pekka Nieminen

Reviewer's report:

General
The topic of this manuscript is of current interest because of the cervical cancer prevention "boom" augmented especially by the HPV vaccines, which are very actively advertised, partly wrongly, as cancer vaccines. However, good quality cervical cancer screening studies build the basis for the present and also for the future Cx Ca prevention and thus are needed. In this manuscript the Background and M&M parts are well written, results are partly confusing and unclear (see below). Discussion could be condensed and sharpened. Figure 1 is very informative.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
The authors should make more clear whether pap-smear taking during the pregnancy or antepartum period is part of the normal organised screening programme, also ages below 25, or is it or has it been encouraged especially during the study years. This is pretty important for understanding the meaning of the study.

The setting of the study is also more important and meaningful in the developed countries, where the age of women with the first pregnancy has greatly shifted to the older years and thus these women are among the target age-groups of the screening. On the other hand the results can not be adapted directly to countries where the pregnancies happen earlier. These things should be made clear and at least partly discussed.

In results part the authors could condense the text, which is partly very laborious to read and understand. Only the most important findings should be in the text, the rest in the tables. In Figure 2 the last two parts, I can not understand the percentage figures, where do they some from? Do the authors want to show the influence of time on smear taking, if so the percentages are definitely wrong?

The discussion is too long. Page 15 first chapter, last sentence. There is no reference for that pregnant women are at more risk for cervical cancer and precancerous lesions. It is also against IARC and EU guidelines to recommend screening below age 25. If done, it produces too much false positives and treatments, which can do harm i.e for the future pregnancies. That sentence should be omitted and the subject discussed.

After these revisions I am willing to accept this manuscript for publication

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)

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: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
'I declare that I have no competing interests'