Reviewer's report

Title: Does a referral from home to hospital affect satisfaction with childbirth? A cross-national comparison

Version: 2 Date: 18 June 2007

Reviewer: Edwin van Teijlingen

Reviewer's report:

When assessing the work, please consider the following points:
1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?
2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?
3. Are the data sound and well controlled?
4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
7. Is the writing acceptable?

The revised article has considerably improved on the original one. The authors had a difficult task as the various reviewers all pointed out slightly different aspects of the original submission that could be improved. The authors have done well in dealing with all these points. The only key criterion not fulfilled is the language. The paper needs to be proof-read by a native English speaker before it can be published.

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

Style some need for proof reading and editing. The authors use a mixture of USA and UK English, e.g. ‘characterize’ or ‘standardized’ with a ‘z’, prenatal care and , but ‘emphasised’, ‘neighbours’ and ‘labour’.

Few grammatical issues, e.g. first sentence Background: ‘The Netherlands is characterized …’ The Netherlands as a country is singular (also on page 13).

In same paragraph "… rare and seldom cross-national"., rare and seldom mean the same! Therefore, remove one, AND it is ‘rarely’ as an adverb, not ‘rare’ as an adjective.

Under the heading: Maternity care in Belgium and the Netherlands

On page 3 “Even so Reuwer and Bruinse [7] state that one third of all planned home deliveries end up in hospital.” The ‘even so’ is not correct in this statement. It should be something like: “As Reuwer and Bruinse [7] note one third of all planned home deliveries end up in hospital.”

In the last sentence above the Methods section the comma is in the wrong place: “Because of the striking discontinuity of care(r), in a case of referral in the Belgian system, we expect women to be more disappointed, hence less satisfied than, their northern neighbours.”

Should read: “Because of the striking discontinuity of care(r), in a case of referral in the Belgian system, we expect women to be more disappointed, hence less satisfied, than their northern neighbours.”

Methods

Many purist would argue that your responses / response rate is Results not Methods. Perhaps the next sentence should be moved from Methods to Results:

“At 30 weeks of pregnancy, 827 women filled out the same questionnaire; 605 of those women also participated in the study in the first two weeks after delivery and completed a second questionnaire.”
Similarly on page 7 the last sentence of the Methods should be first section of Results:

“The response rate is calculated by dividing the number of respondents by the number of provided questionnaires. The estimations ranged between 19% and 68% for the hospitals, and between 38% and 100% for the midwifery practices. Midwives and physicians may have been selective about who they asked to participate in the study.”

Page 7 should:
‘To enhance the readability of the paper we will refer to Belgium and the Netherlands, and the Belgian and the Dutch.’
READ AS:
‘To enhance the readability of the paper we will refer to Belgium and the Netherlands, and the Belgians and the Dutch.’

Results
More Belgian (71.1%) than Dutch (40.8%) women received a higher education, and 85.9% of all women were employed,
Should read:
More Belgian (71.1%) than Dutch (40.8%) women had completed higher education, and 85.9% of all women were employed

Page 10 a sentence such as
‘Note that the Belgian women have an advantage over the Dutch especially in terms of the midwife’s support.’
Is a comment / reflection which is technically not Results but Discussion material.

ALSO
The last paragraph of the Results is also Discussion material or even Conclusion as it starts with the word ‘conclude’
“To conclude, results show that place of birth, more specifically being able to give birth at an expected place, determines how mothers evaluate the birth experience. Moreover this feature operates in a different way in …………”

Discussion
The phrase .."labels home births as a risky business and .." is colloquial, perhaps say: “labels home births as risky and ..”

Page 13
I would use oversampling as one word.

CONCLUSION
The sentence
“The main finding arising from this investigation is about the negative effect of being referred to hospital when a home birth was planned on satisfaction in general, and in regard to self-related aspects of birth.”
Should perhaps read:
“Our main finding is the negative effect of being referred to hospital when a home birth was planned on (1) satisfaction in general and (2) self-related aspects of birth. “

REFERENCES
Reference 5 needs tidying up.

TABLES
May I suggest a slightly simpler title for Table 1:
Socio-demographic variables of Belgian and Dutch respondents

For Table 2
Respondents according to planned and actual place of birth, country and parity

For Table 3
Childbirth satisfaction levels

Key words
May I suggest the following key words, which are not already repeated in the title:

hospital referral
Belgium
the Netherlands
cross-national comparison

Once you have done this, there are also some questions for you to answer, including one that asks your advice on what the next step should be.
Accept after thorough proof-reading by authors.