Reviewer’s report

Title: Peer-mentoring for young first-time mothers from areas of socio-economic disadvantage: a qualitative study within a randomised controlled trial

Version: 1 Date: 19 October 2007

Reviewer: Rhona McInnes

Reviewer's report:

General

This paper makes an important contribution to an area of health care provision that continues to be popular but for which the evidence remains inconsistent. The experiences outlined in this paper resonate clearly with my own experiences of peer support. Exploring potential difficulties within such a programme provides an important step in making programmes more effective.

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

1. Background – I feel that there needs to be more information on the original RCT (is there a reference for this?). Specifically I would like to know the aim of the RCT, what was expected of the mentors and what outcomes were measured.

2. Sample – a separate section outlining purposive selection and maybe some of the characteristics of the women (and mentors) who were actually interviewed would be helpful. Why were the 12 women selected? There is the risk of only asking those who had successful experiences to take part so more information on the selection of the women would be useful. There is also mention of AN and PN samples but it is not clear how this is achieved as I imagine one mentor would follow women through from AN to PN? Does a PN sample therefore indicate more experience on the part of both the women and the mentor? Differences between AN and PN samples may highlight the importance of a developing relationship (or maybe it doesn’t) and would be worth exploring further. Although the use of different samples AN and PN may indicate differences in personalities of those interviewed rather than changes over time and so a comment on this in the discussion may be helpful.

3. Data collection – does early interview and later interview mean AN and PN interview? This is not clear. Fig 2 indicates interview topics – more information is needed on how these were devised.

4. Results:

4.1 Comment 1.3 – what was the question asked here? This response seems not to fit with the others and it is unclear if the midwife was asked a “what would you have done question”. I think it would be helpful to include the question to which
the midwife was responding.

4.2 Comments 2.4 and 2.5 – it is unclear who the midwife is talking about – mentors or women?

4.3 In this section there was also mention of “idea of baby outcome” – what does this mean? Did the mentors do something with the mother? Or was the mother offered something if she took part in the study? Maybe this information could be included in the background information on the original RCT.

4.4 Ethnicity was outlined as influencing peer mentoring – were any women from ethnic backgrounds included in the purposive sample? If so it would be useful to include some comments from them in this section. If they weren’t then this should be highlighted under limitations.

5. Discussion – the first paragraph discusses that retention of mentors was related to the difficulties outlined. Were mentors who resigned included in the interviews? If so maybe a section which compared those who left with those who resigned could be included. If mentors who had resigned were not included then this paragraph becomes unsupported.

6. Limitations – the first sentence is fine but the remaining content under limitations should be included within the methods sections.

7. Conclusions – I didn’t really feel that the study highlighted the value of mentoring but rather highlighted the difficulties. Published studies have already highlighted the value of peer support but this is the first (to my knowledge) which has conducted a more in-depth exploration of the difficulties and this should be emphasised.

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

1. Introduction – the research question appears in the last paragraph of the introduction. This paragraph would benefit from restructuring to make the aim of the qualitative study absolutely clear.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

1. Over all I felt that the construction of some of the sentences was confusing with the main point often being found at the end:

“For 25% of women allocated to receive mentoring, initial mentor contact was never achieved.”

or with two different concepts linked in a manner which made the meaning unclear:

"They felt that women understood their intended role poorly and attempted to develop relationships with them by sharing personal experiences and offering friendship; women who participated in the programme appreciated this."
In the above sentence ‘poorly’ needs to come earlier in the sentence as I initially read this sentence as meaning that women understood their intended role. There were other instances of this type of sentence structure in the paper.

**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, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.