Reviewer's report

Title: Reducing postpartum weight retention - a controlled trial in primary health care

Version: 1 Date: 19 May 2007

Reviewer: Mireille van Poppel

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General
A nice paper on a very relevant topic. The paper describes the results of a large pilot project. The paper might benefit from shortening some of the paragraphs, and clarifying the tables. However, in general it is well written and clear.

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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)

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Specific comments:

Abstract:
• last sentence of methods: … usual care (not the usual care)
• first sentence results: …. at least to their pre-pregnancy weight … Without reading the rest of the paper first, the term ‘at least’ is a bit confusing. Please rephrase.
• Last sentence results: … leisure time … (delete the)
• Conclusions: Larger randomized trials are needed!

Background:
• Last sentence first paragraph: Would suggest “The average postpartum weight retention varies from 0.5 kg to …”

Methods:
• Line 22, page 4: .. at the child’s age of 2,3,5,6 and 10 months.
• Description control and intervention clinics:
I would suggest naming the groups “Usual care” and “Intervention”
First indicate what usual care is: the information collected on PHN’s usual counseling practices. Then indicate that in the usual care group the PHN continued their usual counseling practices. Lastly, in the next paragraph indicate what changes/happened in the intervention group. Now usual care, also in the intervention clinics, is described under the heading “control clinics”, which is a bit strange.
• Line 9, page 7: why was a MET value of 5 chosen as cut off for moderate intensity PA? Normally a cut-off of 3.5 – 4.0 is chosen.
• Line 14, page 7: exactly how was light intensity LTPA taken into account in the calculations?
• Line 12, page 8: the model of Laitakari and Asikainen is mentioned repeatedly. But outside Finland, I do not think this is a well known model. Please describe the essentials of the model in a few sentences.
• The Statistical methods section might be shortened considerably.
I would suggest starting the section with ‘Baseline differences in …… (variable) were tested, using .. (what?) for normally distributed variables and Mann-Whitney U tests for not normally distributed variables (duration of exclusive and partial breastfeeding). Variables with baseline differences were used as covariates in the multivariate analyses.
• What is the added value of the analyses using repeated measures? Figure 2 gives useful information, but can be presented without the description of the repeated measures analyses, since these are unadjusted means.
• The description of the analyses on dietary outcomes and PA can be combined with the weight development analyses (ANCOVA), in order to shorten the paper.
• Is smoking during pregnancy or starting smoking after pregnancy not a relevant variable to include in the analyses, since smoking is related to weight development?

Results:
The section on baseline differences can be shortened (page 25, lines 16-24). Just mention that significant baseline differences were found for ..... and refer to the table.
Why mention the effect of adding breastfeeding to the analyses separately? Subject with missing data might still be included in the analyses when a category with “missing” is construed for this variable. The analyses on retaining maximum 2 or 5 kg is not mentioned in the statistical analyses section. Page 13, line 12: pre-pregnancy PA is not baseline. Baseline was at 2 months postpartum.

Discussion:
Page 14, line 6. What would result from removing the 11 women with self-reported pre-pregnancy overweight from the analyses? This would eliminate the problem of differential bias of self-reported weight at least to some extent. Page 16, line 16/17: … a lower average weight retention than was reported.

Table 1:
Please also give the P values of the tests for baseline differences.

Table 2:
I find this an unclear table because it combines all kinds of analyses and types of outcomes (means, OR). I would suggest presenting the average weights at 2 and 10 months postpartum, the adjusted mean difference (as in Table 3). Leave out the unadjusted OR, and present the adjusted OR in the same column as the mean difference. And present waist circumferences for 2 and 10 months, and the adjusted mean difference.

What next?: Accept after minor essential 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.