Author's response to reviews

Title: The prevalence of stillbirths: a systematic review

Authors:

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Author’s response to reviews: see over
The prevalence of stillbirths: a systematic review

by Lale Say, Allan Donner, A. Metin Gulmezoglu, Monica Taljaard and Gilda Piaggio.

Comments to the authors:

The review is a well set-up clear account of a challenging topic. It is written in clear language and contains useful information. It is surprising that 82% of the selected articles had to be excluded because of the pre-specified criteria and it therefore does focus somewhat on a subgroup. Correctly the authors do mention this in their discussion section.

I have only minor comments:

- I missed the figure numbers and -legends. revised

- The first figure is a vital figure, however could you specify in a legend what the * means? in '70 (80 data sets)*. specified

- The second figure contains 9 studies (data sets?) from Africa. When this is compared to table 2, Africa has only 6 datasets. Can you explain why, or are Benin(1), (2), (3), (4) considered one dataset? Why are they mentioned separately? (The third figure (Europe) contains 29 datasets and that is comparable with the 29 mentioned in table 2) table 2 includes only population based studies (in Africa 6 of the studies are population based and 3 facility based)
Reviewer's report

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General

This study addresses an important public health problem particularly in developing countries. The authors are very well qualified. I believe an improved version of this manuscript will be of a great interest to the readers of your journal.

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

1) In the results section of Summary, I suggest that the authors specify the unit for the rates provided.

   done

2) In the results section of Summary, it is not clear whether the variable ?journal article? refers to the peer-reviewed journal articles or a mix of journal articles.

   We do not think this distinction is needed

3) On the last sentence of first paragraph in the method section, a grammar error needs to be corrected.

   done

4) Under Data extraction and quality assessment, it is not clear as what ??response rate/ completeness of data exceeding 75%? mean? I suggest that the authors further explain as what ?response rate? and ?completeness? mean in the context of journals reporting stillbirth rates.

   clarified

5) Under Statistical Procedures, the authors should provide relevant references for meta-regression as well as appropriate references for the SAS procedure used. In addition, it should be noted that just mentioning ?backward elimination procedure in SAS for Windows? is not adequate. The backward elimination procedure is an OPTION for several procedures used in SAS. It would be also useful to specify the SAS Procedure used along with the Option. The transformation to logistic scale could be further explained or a reference should be provided.

   In the revised article, references for meta-regression are now provided, as well as references for the SAS procedure, which is now described in more detail. The transformation to logistic scale is also explained, and a reference supplied.
Reviewer's report

Title: The prevalence of stillbirths: a systematic review

Date: 15 November 2005

Reviewer: Malinee Laopaiboon

Reviewer's report:
General

The paper is very interesting and provides benefit evidence for maternal and child health service.

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Some Comments

1. It would be clear for readers if the authors explain what the population and facility-based studies are and whether they provided similarly data of studied characteristics. It is because the data sets of population based of 63 is nearly 4 times of facility-based (17). Explained in introduction section para 2.

2. If the table 1 presents the description of data sets for population-based and facility-based, it would help the readers to understand whether they should be combined and analysed by the meta-regression. This was not done because of the expected wide variation between facility and population based rates

3. For the same reason as of comment 2, the pooled stillbirth rates as presented in table 2 should be provided for subgroups of facility-based data sets. We thought population based estimates should be closer to the actual picture as particularly in developing countries problematic cases are more likely to give birth in facilities

4. The results analysed in the combined data sets as showed in table 3 were dominated by the data of population based. So it may be not convincing for the presentation of both population-based and combined data sets. This was done to show the extent of variation between population and facility based data sets.

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

The paper would be accepted if the authors clarify the points as I comment.