Reviewer’s report

Title: The prevalence of stillbirths: a systematic review

Version: 2 Date: 23 November 2005

Reviewer: Mohammad Hossein Rahbar

Reviewer’s report:

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.

---------------------------------------------------------------

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.
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.
3) On the last sentence of first paragraph in the method section, a grammar error needs to be corrected.
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.
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.
6) It appears that the authors have not addressed potential interactions in their multivariate models. If possible, it would add value to test for potential interactions and report in the revised manuscript.
7) In the results section, the authors report notable differences in the stillbirth rates (e.g., notable difference between the rates for the developed and less/least developed countries. I am wondering why appropriate p-values are not reported for such comparisons throughout the manuscript.
8) The statement on page 11, “These two variables explain 52.4% of the total variation in still birth rates” could be confusing. I suggest that the authors provide additional information about this statement. I would also suggest that the authors provide more details about the “underlying assumptions” that they have tested.
9) On page 12, the statement “the remaining variation could be due to other unmeasured characteristics, either at the study level or at the individual level that could not be tested in this analysis” is also confusing. This is particularly relevant when the unit of analysis is “study” and not a multi-level modeling strategy for capturing variations at various levels.

---------------------------------------------------------------

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?:** Accept without revision

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests