Author's response to reviews

Title: The safe motherhood referral system to reduce cesarean sections and perinatal mortality - a cross-sectional study [1995-2006]

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Author's response to reviews: see over
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**MS: 1281080670588343 - The safe motherhood referral system to reduce cesarean sections and perinatal mortality –a cross-sectional study [1999-2006]**

José Guilherme Cecatti

Editor in Chief / Reproductive Health Journal

Dear Editor

I am sending the files reformulated, according to the suggestions of the reviewer. The answers are detailed below and corrections are highlighted blue (reformulations) and yellow (inclusions) in the text.

Best regards, Iracema MP Calderon

**Reviewer's report Major Compulsory Revisions:**

- please use "antenatal/intrapartum care" instead of "antenatal/intrapartum assistance" consistently alongside all the text – OK [highlighted in blue]

- please use "Cesarean section rate" instead of "Cesarean section percentage" in the whole text – OK [highlighted in blue]

- when describing rates, like perinatal mortality rate or maternal mortality ratio, please refer that they are per live births (LB)


  Maternal mortality ratio = /100,000 live births (LB) – OK [highlighted in blue]

  Perinatal mortality rate = /1000 births – OK [highlighted in blue]
Minor Essential Revisions:

- In the Introduction, second paragraph, it should be maternal mortality ratio instead of rate. Please check in all the text; there are others like this. OK [highlighted in blue]

- Introduction, third paragraph, last line: please add "...with a history of very high hospital..." (I suggest to insert "a history") / OK [highlighted in blue]

- Introduction, fourth paragraph, second line: please add "operational study" and delete "maternal" from "maternal health program" / OK [highlighted in blue]

- Introduction, fourth paragraph, fourth line: delete "of maternal and neonatal care" (it is repeated) / OK [highlighted in blue]

- Introduction, fourth paragraph, seventh line: add "management" between "diagnoses" and "and clinical programs" / OK [highlighted in blue]

- Methods session: "procedure" is a not appropriate word. What about "operational research"? / OK [highlighted in blue]

- Methods session, item "Safe motherhood referral system", second paragraph: The last phrase of this paragraph would be better in this way: "As a result, all high risk pregnant women were planned to deliver at the Level III hospital, and all low-risk pregnant women were planned to deliver at the Level II hospitals". / OK [highlighted in blue]

- Results session, first paragraph: these figures of deliveries are for both hospitals? If yes, please state so. The last phrase "Of these deliveries..." would be better as "Among these deliveries..." / OK [highlighted in blue]

- Results session: it would be interesting if the data in table 1 could be stratified according to each year of the whole period, or even in two periods, in order to see if there was a historical trend. / OK [Table 1 has been redesigned and the data presented were divided into three periods: 1995 – 1998; 1999 –2002 and 2003 – 2006] / see Table 1 (page 17).

- Results, third paragraph referring to Figure 1: it should contain the information regarding the effect of time. / OK [see the end of the second paragraph on page 6]

- Results, fourth paragraph, third line: I think it should be "during" instead of "between" / OK [highlighted in blue]

- Results, eighth paragraph: it is not clear for a common reader. Its content should be better explained. OK / the text has been rewritten [see the end of the second paragraph on page 7]

- Discussion session, first paragraph: this is a cross sectional study only describing the results of an operational study which introduced a referral system for safer motherhood. There is no
group of comparison, nor a systematic comparison before and after the introduction of the system. Therefore caution should be taken into account for conclusions and recommendations. It is not correct to say that "the referral system was shown to be an effective strategy for decreasing a C-section rate" for instance. It could preferably be "to be associated with a decrease in the C-section rate". The same kind of affirmation is repeated some times during the discussion and conclusions. Please rewrite these passages. OK / These passages have been rewritten throughout the text.

- In addition, I think the manuscript lacks here a comment on the possible cohort effect. It means, it lasts around 12 years and it would be expected that some trends were changing during this period, only because there were improvements in the way the care were provided for women, independently of the referral system itself. This should be taken into account and commented in the discussion session. There is no way to eliminate this possibility, considering there was no comparison group. / OK [highlighted in blue]

- The discussion should also contain more details on possible limitations of this type of study and the problems possible to find when adapting this experience to other realities / OK [highlighted in blue]

- Figures: they are too "heavy". Please try to improve their quality

- Figure 2: it is not necessary to keep in the figure both vaginal births and C-sections. Considering they are complementary, please show only C-section rates. This is more than enough and also make it easier to see and understand. / OK / All figures have been rebuilt with better quality, according to the suggestions of the reviewer