Reviewer's report

Title: Persistence of primary care consultations for non-specific physical symptoms in children: a cohort study

Version: 2
Date: 26 September 2014

Reviewer: Fiona Boland

Reviewer's report:

I think this paper is interesting and examines whether maternal consultations influences non-specific physical symptoms in children in North Staffordshire, UK. However, I have a few issues / queries regarding the study in its present form. I have outlined my concerns below:

Major Compulsory Revisions

L104 - L107: Was the number of children per household included in the analysis?

L109 – L112: Does this mean that you were guessing the identification of a mother? Could a sister or grandmother be mistaken as the mother? I think this would be a substantial limitation.

L114: Were consulters defined as persistent if they consulted for the same NSPS or any NSPS? The use of ‘persistent’ throughout the manuscript seems confusing to me. Persistent in the context of the manuscript means that a child consulted for NSPS in 2009 and at least once in 2010. Hence, a child may only consult for NSPS twice. I would not call this persistent; I would say a subsequent consultation in the following year. Did you run a sensitivity analysis defining patients with, for example, at least 3 or 4 consultations, as persistent?

L161: why was household member count dichotomized, could you have used the actual number of members in the household instead?

Table 2 and 3 do not show any p-values?

Table 1: Please indicate for each of the variables what test was used.

Minor Essential Revisions

L35: Should be ‘main outcome measures’ and not ‘measure’

L185, L221: Significant at what level?

L202: should be p = 0.029, not p 0.029

L201 – 203: Rounding the percentages from table 1 gives 39% instead of 38% and 14% instead of 13%

L207: Is it 25% and 17% of the 27% who had persistent consultations for any
NSPS?

L211-213: Please include the median number of consultations. It would be helpful also to see the actual frequencies associated with the number of consultations.

L223: sentence is a little confusing, suggest rephrasing sentence. Perhaps change ‘older child age groups were’ to ‘age was’

Line 231 – 234: include what this was adjusted for.

Line 237: Range 1-12 for exposed children and 1-16 for non-exposed children. Line 212 states the range was 1-17 overall. Is this an error?

Line 241: be clear that it’s a 22% increase in the incidence rate of consultation...

Figure 1: title should be ‘percentage’ and not ‘proportion’
Tables 2 and 3: associations can mean many things; I would suggest rephrasing / changing the titles.

Discretionary Revisions
Title: Suggest adding the country where the study was conducted.

L44: add in what you adjusted for at the end of the sentence.

L45: to be clear, change to ‘for specific NSPS groups’

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests.

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.