Reviewer’s report

Title: Physical activity and depressive symptoms after stillbirth: Informing future interventions

Version: 2
Date: 8 September 2014
Reviewer: Sara Holton

Reviewer’s report:

The manuscript, ‘Physical activity and depressive symptoms after stillbirth: Informing future interventions’, reports on an issue that has important clinical implications. Such research assists in understanding whether physical activity improves depressive symptoms in women who have experienced a stillbirth, and acceptable physical interventions for women after stillbirth.

Nevertheless, although this is a potentially interesting paper, it is my opinion that the paper requires revisions before it could be published in BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth.

Major Compulsory Revisions
N/A

Minor Essential Revisions

Abstract

Line 49: It is not clear where these figures are from. Are they US data? Please state.
Line 50 (and throughout the manuscript): Please rephrase the term “women with stillbirth” to “women who have had a stillbirth” or “women who have experienced a stillbirth” etc. And similarly, “women with live birth” to “women who have had a live birth” etc.
Line 58: Please change “women were between 19 and 45 years” to “women who were aged between 19 and 45 years”.
Line 58: This meaning of this sentence is not very clear. Were women aged between 19 and 45 years and had a stillbirth within the previous year eligible to participate in the study? If so, please rephrase this sentence so that this is clear.
Line 59: I would suggest rephrasing this sentence to: An online survey was used for this study and included questions about …
Line 60: I would suggest avoiding the use of euphemisms and here and throughout the text avoid the use of the term “loss” and instead use “stillbirth”. Otherwise it is not clear what “loss” you are referring to.
Line 65: “seventy five” needs a hyphen (ie seventy-five)
Line 69: “reasons for participating in physical activity” – when? After stillbirth? The participants’ exercise rates seem quite high given the previous sentence.
Line 69: how many participants had depressive symptoms? I would suggest stating this first before discussing using physical exercise to help with depressive symptoms.

Line 70: in the previous sentence only 38% of participants used physical activity to help with depressive symptoms but in this sentence it is 58%. This is confusing. Please be clear about results reporting.

Line 78: You haven't identified that you are investigating physical sequelae elsewhere in the abstract.

Keywords

Line 82: Shouldn't “stillbirth” be a key word?

Background

Line 87: need to state location. is this data just for the US?

Line 91: this sentence is not clear. Please rephrase.

Line 99: there is a lot being covered in this paragraph. Could it be broken down into smaller more focused ones?

Line 105: Please use “mothers” for an international journal instead of “moms” as this is not a term widely used outside the US.

Line 105: perhaps ‘similar to’ would be a better term to use than “mirrored”? 

Line 118: why is “regularly” written in italics?

Methods

Line 140: it would be perhaps be better to state the year here?

Line 140: Why wasn't current pregnancy an exclusion? Wouldn't current pregnancy affect women's regular physical activity levels, patterns etc?

Line 147: how did participants click on a link in a flyer?

Line 149: this would be better expressed as “completion of the survey was taken as consent”

Line 152: contacted about what? a future study? receiving a summary of the results?

Line 156: why might weight gain during pregnancy be important? This needs to be explained in the Introduction.

Line 156: “physical activity participation over time” - time period? lifetime? past 5 years? since pregnant etc? since stillbirth etc

Line 160: please elaborate “demographics”. such as? marital status? SES? ethnicity?

Line 164: ‘depressive symptomatology’ instead of “depression”

Line 175: “perinatal death”, Do you mean stillbirth here? Please be consistent with terms used or define if using new term.

Line 175: ‘relationship’ instead of “relation” (and elsewhere throughout the text eg
Lines 178 and 179: need to define 'active' and 'inactive'.

Results
Line 199: “thirty eight” needs a hyphen (ie thirty-eight)
Line 200: “38%” does not need to be included here again
Line 206: would prefer to do yoga

Discussion
Line 218: it is not stated in the Methods that women’s preferences were asked about. This needs to be included if this was the case. (see also line 270)
Line 220: I’m not sure that the results actually support this claim. I think the results show that physical activity should be incorporated into interventions for women who have experienced stillbirth.
Line 247: the direction isn’t clear here. Is regular physical activity related to a decrease in depressive symptoms?
Line 254: this isn’t reported in the Results or mentioned in the Methods.
Line 266 and 267: Are you referring to participants in this study?
Line 275: Why are “non-married populations” “underserved”?  
Line 281: or maybe women who were already participating in physical activity or more interested in it were more likely to complete the survey?
Line 284: ?You have just stated that you can’t infer direction but then have done so in this sentence.

Conclusion
Line 290: You haven’t really stated anywhere what these are.

Discretionary Revisions
N/A

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

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.

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