Reviewer’s report

Title: Defining and describing birth centres in the Netherlands - a component study of the Dutch Birth Centre Study

Version: 0 Date: 29 Jan 2017

Reviewer: Christine Mccourt

Reviewer's report:

This was a clear and potentially useful study, but its relevance and value will be enhanced by drawing more fully on the international literature on the topic to ensure that this work to define and describe the characteristics of Dutch birth centres has international comparability and value. Detailed recommendations are provided below.

Abstract: this provides a reasonably clear overview. Consider using the word mapping in the title to make clear the type of survey.

Keywords - I recommend you add midwifery unit and midwife-led unit as these are commonly used.

Introduction

This is clear and readable. On line 111, suggest you use a different term from 'coarse' - e.g., basic

A little more information on the context is needed for the international readership. Please add some detail about the health system - e.g. National Health Service, Insurance Based, Maternity professionals employed, status, positions and roles of midwives?

Methods

These were succinct but clear overall. Line 121 is confusing. Was this not sent to all hospitals? Why one?
Findings

It would be helpful to clarify the meaning of independent midwife as used here, as in a country like the UK this would distinguish a midwife working outside the NHS, with private payment from a midwife (the majority) employed within the NHS. This might be tackled in the background section where I have recommended some data to clarify the health/maternity care system and role and status of midwives in the Netherlands. This issue is important for international comparisons - which would be one of the key values of this study - as in some other countries a birth centre might be midwifery managed, but the midwives not categories as independent community midwives. I think this is a particularity of the Dutch midwifery system and would be important to clarify for the international readership and for comparison of definitions.

Discussion

Currently, this is the weakest part of the article and needs more development to enhance its value and international relevance.

In particular, there is a lack of reference to the international literature on definitions and features of birth centres/midwifery units (likewise, in the background this is only mentioned in passing and some key studies are not cited.

Overall, there is a lack of reference to key evidence relevant to the study. For example, the Birthplace in England birth centre definitions study. This is important in that currently, the article appears to have a relatively narrow reference point, whereas it has potential to have more international usefulness, particularly to support international comparisons of outcomes.

On lines 385-393 there is discussion about the issue of travel time but this reads as somewhat contradictory. The evidence that distance is not associated with adverse outcomes is acknowledged and yet the discussion still seems to suggest that this should be treated as a problem. Relevant literature, such as the Birthplace in England analysis of transfer data, the Danish research by Overgaard on freestanding midwifery units and the Canadian literature should be referred to. The Birthplace in England study, for example, shows that average travel time from freestanding midwifery units in England was high, yet FMUs were found to have the optimum outcomes.
Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Unable to assess

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Needs some language corrections before being published

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