Reviewer’s report

Title: Listening to women's voices: the experience of giving birth with paramedic care in Queensland, Australia

Version: 0 Date: 30 Apr 2019

Reviewer: Ank De Jonge

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for asking me to review this paper. It is interesting that the study highlights aspects of unplanned out-of-hospital birth that have not been given much attention in the literature and that can provide insight into aspects of care that are in need of change. However, I think some major revisions are required before the paper can be published.

Major issues

The study seems to be focused mainly on positive aspects of unplanned out-of-hospital births. After reading this paper it almost seems as if women who have an unplanned out-of-hospital birth are lucky. There are two major problems with this:

- Unplanned out-of-hospital births are unintended and potentially risky. There is evidence that these births lead to higher rates of perinatal mortality for example (See Hemmini 2011: Should births be centralised in higher level hospitals? BJOG, Jauvadin 2019 ). I think it is important to write in the introduction that the main reason for understanding the phenomenon of unplanned out of hospital birth is to prevent them from happening. It may well be true that women feel empowered once the birth went well but they would have felt different probably if there had been complications.

- Many women identified a need for normal childbirth and several were worried about interventions if they went to hospital too early; midwives also encouraged women to come in late for this reason. Rather than being so positive about unplanned out of hospital birth, I think this exposes some fundamental flaws in the maternity care system. The stories highlight the need of professionals within the system to listen better to what women want rather than impose protocols on them. It also shows that midwives apparently are not strong enough or are not in a position to be advocates for women in their care and make sure that they are listened to and do not receive unnecessary interventions. Instead, they advice women to stay away from hospital care as long as they can. Surely, if the system is so medicalised that professionals working in the system advice you not to go there as long as you can something must be wrong.

- Of course there are benefits of birthing outside hospitals as the literature shows (literature that is not included in the paper now). Planned births outside obstetric units appear to be safe and lead to fewer medical interventions for low risk women but in a context of good risk selection within a system with well trained midwives to attend women at home or in birth centres and with
a good transportation system and back up system of hospitals if medical interventions are required. It could be one of the recommendations to enable more planned out of hospital births that meet all these criteria in order to prevent unplanned out of hospital births.

- The research question is not quite clear to me: '… to explore women's perspective'. Perspective on what?

- Purposive sampling was used until data saturation was achieved. Was any sampling frame used to ensure enough variety among participants, for example in ethnic background, maternal age, education and type of birth? I am surprised that 'women's narratives did not express any significant concerns that something 'might go wrong' '. This is not my experience as a midwife; in retrospect women may feel good about an unplanned out of hospital birth, but at the time many are worried (and their partners!). This suggests that the sample may not have captured all the lived experiences of women with unplanned out of hospital births. I would suggest to purposely sample 2 or 3 women who had a less positive experience. For example, who had to be transferred to hospital because of complications or who were worried during the birth.

- Many references are very old. In the discussion several statements are made without reference to the literature. A simple search shows that several articles have been written about unplanned out of hospital birth in recent years, which I miss in the reference list. In particular, there is no discussion on other articles on women's experiences of unplanned out of hospital birth. For example, Erlandsson 2015, Women's experience of unplanned out of hospital birth in Sweden, Sex Reprod Health. This article found that one of the main themes was "The lived experience of a pendular movement between the good fortune and pride in managing the situation and the fear of what could have happened when giving unplanned birth outside a hospital environment." This contrasts with the authors’ finding that women did not express any concern that things might go wrong.

Other issues

- p.20: 'Restrictions apply to the availability of the non-identified data'. What are these restrictions?

I hope the authors will make revisions to the article as the interview material is very interesting and could provide some valuable lessons for improving maternity care. I wish them good luck in making the changes.

**Are the methods appropriate and well described?**
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

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

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?**
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No

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