Reviewer’s report

Title: A Meta-Analysis of the Impacts of Internal Migration on Child Health Outcomes in China

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Reviewer: Safa Abdalla

Reviewer’s report:

The paper reports on a systematic review and meta-analysis of the impacts of internal migration on child health outcomes in China, a very important topic. The authors systematically reviewed the published literature to address questions on the impact of internal migration on mental health and physical health, as well as the protective and risk factors. Overall the paper is well-written but gaps in the methodology remain. Specific comments follow:

Introduction:

The introduction gives sufficient background but will need to be reduced in volume, e.g. the part about the situation in the EU can be easily disposed of without affecting it. I suggest it gets reduced to refer only to China.

Mou et al published a review of the literature on China's rural-urban migrants and their families (http://bmb.oxfordjournals.org/content/106/1/19.full), so how does this review add to Mou et al's?

Page 8 paragraph starting at line 34: Removing the detail on the items used will make the message clearer.

Study questions: Don't questions 2 and 4 overlap? -wellbeing includes mental health.

Methods:

The search strategy was clear but a search of the grey literature and unpublished studies could reduce the threat of publication bias.

Rigorous quality assessment is required. The checklist used has components 1, 2, 4 and 5 based on the quality of reporting rather than the quality of study conduct and the only component that assesses the methodology is number 3. Rigorous assessment of the actual methodology of the studies was needed, e.g. sources of bias and role of confounders according to each study design.

What is the age range of 'school age' in China?
Exclusion criteria seem to be just opposites of the inclusion criteria so they may not add much information, except for number 3.

Page 11 line 14: can the authors explain how "all studies were eligible for inclusion"; the flowchart shows most studies were excluded.

it would be clearer if the mental health outcomes were defined in the methodology

Results:

Figure 1: 601 studies excluded; why?

Table 2: what does DI stand for? Also please include the study design for each study.

Discussion:

Page 20 line 34: It is much more preferable to commit to the 95% confidence interval and to not make any statements with a lower confidence level.

Conclusion:

Rigorous assessment of the methodology of the included studies and a search strategy that minimizes publication bias are needed before making such a clear-cut conclusion.

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?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

No

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
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