Reviewer’s report

Title: How useful are registered birth statistics for health and social policy? A global systematic assessment of the availability and quality of birth registration data.

Version: 0 Date: 19 Aug 2018

Reviewer: Wendy Graham

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This is an interesting and well-written paper, proposing one approach to assessing the completeness and quality of birth registration data. The background and methods are comprehensive, the Results well-described, and the Tables and Figures appropriate. There are, however, weaknesses in the Discussion, Conclusion and Abstract in terms of under-emphasizing the two major caveats to the proposed approach: the calculation of completeness based on a denominator from annual estimates of total births produced by the United Nations Population Division (p.7, line 42); and the reliance on publically available data - in other words, essentially reflecting the availability of data rather than completeness. Whilst these limitations are mentioned, their significance and the consequent need for cautious interpretation warrants greater emphasis. For example, whilst the article acknowledges the methodological and empirical uncertainties in the UNPD estimates, the option of calculating ratios between these estimates and those from their database could have been explored, so highlighting the imprecision in both sources. Similarly, the absence of public availability of birth registration data does not necessarily equate to lack of availability for health and social policy-making. The article would benefit from a more balanced presentation of these limitations, so generating both further research on other approaches - beyond this one - for ascertaining completeness, and further calls for greater public availability of data.

Minor comments:

1. The abstract needs to make clearer reference to how the paper addresses the first part of the paper title "How useful are registered birth statistics for health and social policy?"

2. P 9, line 60 "missingness" is not a real word

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