

## **MIDIRS Midwifery Digest Guidelines for abstract writers**

### **Introduction**

MIDIRS Midwifery Digest aims to help midwives and readers from other health care backgrounds to analyse, evaluate and use the findings from research evidence in their clinical practice. The reader needs to understand the weaknesses as well as the strengths of a particular piece of research. Each abstract will be a comprehensive critical appraisal of an article, this should be an in-depth examination of the rationale, methodology, findings and authors' conclusions. Any implications for practice can then be evaluated and discussed.

### **Philosophy and Style**

Implicit in MIDIRS' philosophy is a respect for women as equal partners in care, and as individuals with diverse needs. Any proposed intervention should respond to a woman's social, emotional and cultural as well as her purely physical needs. The abstract needs to be free from jargon and written in a friendly style. Keep in mind the practising midwife or other reader who may have little specialist research knowledge. Also note that many of the journals covered by MIDIRS are not aimed at midwives and may take a different perspective, eg anaesthetics, obstetrics, ultrasonography. Any critical appraisal needs to take this different perspective into account and examine closely any implied assumptions.

**It is suggested** that you read through the paper just to get a general feel for it before undertaking a more in-depth review following the route suggested below. However, on first reading through the paper you have been sent, if you think it is not suitable for review *please discuss this with the Editor before putting a great deal of work into the abstract.*

### **Format for your abstract**

We have now moved towards a more formal approach to these abstracts by using, where it is available, the original structured abstract to the paper. Therefore, where this exists you do not have to repeat the information as part of your comments.

### **Approaching a review**

It is suggested that you approach the review using some form of framework or process. The research approach will determine what framework you use. A suggested outline to follow is given below for experimental studies such as randomised controlled trials, but any critical appraisal tool that you are familiar with would be acceptable (i.e. Rees 2003, Cluett & Bluff 2000 page 194 see below )

- Title of paper / Authors
- Background / Literature review (if relevant)
- Objective(s)
- Design / Research method or approach. For an experimental study, what intervention is being tested
- The setting / participants /sample and sample size anticipated
- Results (including the approach used for analysis)
- Key conclusions (the researchers'; not yours) and the validity or trustworthiness of these )
- Implications for practice (if any)
- Abstract writer's comments

There are also two useful publications to help with critical reviews: Rees C. 2003 *An introduction to Research for Midwives* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) Oxford; Butterworth Heinemann. Cluett E. Bluff R in : *Principles and Practice of Research in Midwifery* Bailliere Tindall London 2000 pp179-196.

Some reports do not lend themselves to this formalised style. Examples might include descriptive studies, literature reviews or case studies. Your review should still consider aspects of trustworthiness (for qualitative approaches) and the potential for bias. Where these articles are abstracted in prose form, headings might be appropriate to guide the reader. The abstract should still end with the abstract writer's comments in the same way.

### **Abstract writer's comments**

This is usually the most interesting and useful part of the abstract, and is your opportunity to be challenging and thought provoking. Aim for a writing style here that is lively, readable and where appropriate, questioning. Where you include your own opinions try to support these with some degree of authenticity or evidence. This should include your comments on the strength and weaknesses of the study, its methodology and the conclusions drawn by the researchers. This is where you can place the study in the context of current midwifery practice and any other relevant studies with which you are familiar. You might want to suggest additional questions which were not answered in the study, and weigh up its overall relevance and usefulness for midwives. If the study has not been undertaken by midwives you might reflect on how a midwifery perspective might have altered or enhanced the study. Please consider issues related to whether the research has been conducted in an ethical manner and any political or commercial factors that might have an impact on the findings. If you need advice, please contact me .

### **Length**

The length of any abstract should not normally exceed 10% of the original article. Therefore the word limit allocated is around 700–1000 words (including your comments). Longer abstracts may be required from time to time and the word limit for these will be from 1000 to 1500. All material accepted for publication may be edited according to space restrictions.

### **References**

In the comment section you may need to use a small number of key references to support your commentary. The accuracy of these references is your responsibility so it is really helpful if you can ensure that you have provided a full reference and accurate reference for all the sources mentioned in your text. Please use the *Harvard* style (where the name of the author is included in the text). References should then be presented in alphabetical order at the end in a consistent format. Only the first three authors need be named, with the fourth and further authors replaced by *et al.* Book and journal titles are to be given in italics and the full title of the journal included. There is additional guidance on referencing in a separate paper. If you do need help or you have any problems with references, please contact the information services on 0117 9077590 or 9077593.

### **Submitting your abstract**

The easiest way to send material is by attachment to an email: [editor@midirs.org](mailto:editor@midirs.org). Alternatively, you can send your article on disk. We can accept IBM compatible disks, preferably produced using Word for Windows or WordPerfect. Please say which word processing package you have used, and supply a word count (excluding abstract and references). If you have any queries about the disk format, please contact Val Dickens on 0117 9077595. The abstract will be attributed to you, so please could you make sure that you include the following as you would like it to appear in print: your name, full title, and job/appointment at the time of writing. Then please also include a current address (including telephone and fax numbers) for our use for correspondence.

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**Conflict of interest:** Please make explicit any potential conflict of interest which might have biased the abstract and commentary. This could be financial, personal, political or academic.

**Deadlines:** On agreeing to write an abstract, you will have been given a date by which we would like this to be completed. **Please try your best to keep to this** as space in the Digest will have been reserved for your contribution. Occasionally an abstract has to be held over to the next edition because of space restrictions, but you will be informed prior to publication. The Digest is published quarterly at the beginning of March, June, September and December each year and setting for publication is finalised about 6 weeks in advance. Please discuss any queries with regard to the professional content with the Editor, Sally Marchant email [Editor@midirs.org](mailto:Editor@midirs.org). or direct line 0117 9077589]

**Thank you for offering to undertake this work for MIDIRS.**