

The Birth Place Research Quality Index (ResQu Index) is a tool that researchers, clinicians, and consumers can use to evaluate research that assesses the impact of birthplace on health outcomes for mother and baby, interventions, and costs.

Families, doctors, midwives and policymakers often make decisions about where to plan a birth based on their understanding of the published research. However, they sometimes draw different conclusions about the safety of home, birth center or hospital birth, even when they read the same studies. This is, in part, because there has been no standardized way to assess the quality of the available studies. Hence, there is a lot of division and debate about relative safety and value of home, birth center, and hospital births in the medical community; and there have been several articles in the news that say one or the other is better.

The ResQu Index was designed to provide a reliable instrument to rate the quality of primary research on this contentious topic. An international panel of experts from a variety of backgrounds, including perinatal research, obstetrics, midwifery, service users, and public health, developed this tool to rate the quality of primary research on health outcomes by place of birth. The development process involved multiple rounds of consultations to select relevant items, assess them for clarity and importance, and to develop a weighted scoring system. The components of the index align with best practice standards for critical appraisal tools.

To rate a study, the user selects the most appropriate numeric value for each of 27 scored items across seven domains of research quality that are universally recognized and described in the context of birth place. The sum of the values creates a total score (out of a possible 100 points) for each study. Higher-scoring studies have greater potential to inform the evidence-based selection of birthplace by clinicians, policy makers, and women and their families. When used to assess the quality of studies in a large systematic review, the researchers found the Index rating system to be practical, consistent, and user-friendly

This reliable, evidence-based rating tool can transform the design and interpretation of research on this highly-contested topic in maternity care. It has the potential to enhance the rigour, transparency, and relevance of birthplace research. The Index can also guide the design of future studies on place of birth.