Reviewer’s report

Title: Participation in everyday activities and quality of life in pre-teenage children living with cerebral palsy in South West Ireland.

Version: 1 Date: 25 May 2008

Reviewer: Mary Law

Reviewer’s report:

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?

The purpose of the paper is stated within the first paragraph in the background section. The questions are complex and not well defined. The rationale for the paper is to fill a gap in research with children with CP in Ireland. The rationale for why participation for children with CP in Ireland is different to children with CP in other countries where large studies of children with CP have taken place is not articulated. The paper goes on to talk about quality of life and participation; however this purpose is not stated in the initial declaration in the paper.

In the background section leading up to the methodology the specific questions to which the research is aimed are not explicitly stated. The statement that “work with children with CP is only now coming to the forefront” is not a strong rationale for the study and not accurate from a global perspective.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?

Although the overall study design (cross sectional) is appropriate, the rational for the specific measures used is not described in enough detail for the reader. The sample size was based on convenience with no discussion of potential bias implications. Conceptual definitions of participation and quality of life are not defined in detail as to how these relate to the study. Current literature on children’s participation encourages data collection from the perspective of the child. This study use proxy reports from parents and the rationale for this is not clear. The comparison group of children in mainstream schools is also not well defined. Did the authors ascertain whether any of these children had a disability or health condition other than CP? It is assumed that this group was typically developing but there was no indication of how this was controlled.

The measure used to capture frequency of participation was developed specifically for use in this study. There is no description on how this measure was tested or if it was validated prior to use in the study. The rationale for developing their own measure of participation frequency was not stated. The collapsing of categories and methods used to provide scores for missing data are not supported with a rationale or evidence. Overall it does not appear that the frequency of participation is captured, rather it is the type of activities that children participate in that is primarily reported.
3. Are the data sound?

It is difficult to match the analysis with the purpose of the study and based on the purpose stated in the initial background section, the analysis does not flow. Quality of life associated with level of CP and participation frequency is evaluated but not explicitly stated as a purpose of the research. The authors discuss the development of model building using regression however the details of this process are not shared. This section would be easier to follow if the data analysis was matched clearly in the text with the specific question it aims to answer. It is not clear why both ANOVA’s and regression analyses are completed to examine the relationships between age, gender and participation.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data depositions?

Yes, for the most part. Given that the sample size of children with CP is relatively small, there are many statistical tests carried out on these data.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

The discussion about the results does not do an adequate job of linking the results of this study to similar studies in other parts of the world. There is reference to some studies but no detailed discussion occurs. The statement “this study concurs with their findings where we found removing barriers in society to promote inclusion is essential to ensure participation for all children with disability” is not supported by the methodology and purpose of this study. This study aimed to describe a population of children with CP in Ireland while the discussion and conclusions make statements about predictors of participation – such conclusions are not warranted given that the data are cross-sectional in nature. Since this study appears to be one of specific areas/communities in Ireland it would be fitting to link the results to the local context in terms of resources for participation for children with CP.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?

There was no identification of limitations

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building?

The authors have stated that this type of work has not been done before and therefore imply that it is novel and independent of other work.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?

The title is accurate. The methods section of the abstract needs more details in terms of the types of analysis run. The conclusion in the abstract is not accurate as it is not possible to state, based on these data, that the effect of CP can be counteracted by increasing participation.
9. Is the writing acceptable?

The paper was interesting to read but challenging to follow. The reader was left wanting more details from the literature review, and rationale for the measures used in the study. Cause and effect conclusions were made that are not supported by the data. The paper was poorly organized and would be improved with the use of subheadings and matching of each research questions to the method of analysis. On page 9 there is a paragraph that starts with “Bjornson and McLaughlin…” that should be placed in the measures section of the methodology.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.