Reviewer's report

Title: Children's active play: self-reported motivators, barriers and facilitators.

Version: 2 Date: 2 March 2011

Reviewer: Chloe McAdam

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this interesting paper.

I have a number of comments and suggestions for changes which are outlined below:

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

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
   Qualitative research and focus groups are suitable for this exploratory research context. Some clarification/additional information is required in describing the methods employed (see below)

3. Are the data sound?
   I believe so but I have made some suggestions for revisions in relation to this below

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
   The authors must clarify their data storage procedures

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
   The authors' concluding statements suggest generalisable results, so these need to be tempered slightly e.g. Use of the term 'may', use of 'amongst these participants' etc

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
   Yes

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
   Yes - this work is set in context with their previous research

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

9. Is the writing acceptable?
Yes

Major Compulsory Revisions

Gender differences - you suggest that you analysed these data by gender and conclude that there may be gender differences, but these are not fully presented in the results and it is not clear from the quotations/themes presented what these gender differences may be. I do not think you can make this conclusion without the explicit presentation or discussion of these data.

The gender make-up of the focus groups is also not presented. Were these single-sex groups or mixed? I do not think the use of mixed-gender focus groups would be appropriate to complete a concrete analysis of gender differences since the very nature of a focus group means children will respond to other children's answers and may be more likely to conform/react to traditional gender norms.

Differences by Deprivation

You recruited children from schools in areas of varying deprivation, but do not discuss whether you examined any differences in children's perceptions/experiences by deprivation? I imagine that this sampling may have been chosen to give a more representative sample or to provide a range of views rather than for a comparison and as such you may struggle to complete a full analysis of any differences due to the sample size. However, a sentence or two indicating any emerging results by deprivation and why these data cannot be used to complete a full analysis could be added.

Data storage - a sentence describing how these data were kept should be added.

Police Check - a sentence indicating if the author required a police check/authorisation from local education authority to complete this research should be added after the discussion of ethical clearance.

Use of the term 'gang'

I do not feel that the use of the term 'gang' in the abstract, discussion and conclusion is warranted when referring to groups of teenagers. This term does not appear to come from the transcripts and implies criminal activity which is not what the children appear to be referring to in your results. Children appeared to view the presence of teenagers in general as a barrier to their active play, regardless of what the teenagers were doing/not doing. Simply 'teenagers' or 'groups of teenagers' would be more appropriate in this context.

Themes - Enjoyment

The results presented under enjoyment include specifically the social aspect of active play. This finding is often reported as a benefit of PA more generally and I don't think it should be overlooked or included under enjoyment, as in this case.

Themes - Freedom

I do not think the quotes you have used under this term indicate that children perceive active play gives them a sense of freedom. In two of the quotes used,
the children speak about letting off steam and relaxing in the way adults might talk about the way that PA might have a stress reduction effect. I feel this is more related to the mental health benefits of active play rather than freedom from rules/adults.

Minor Essential Revisions
Page 5 - last line: Change the term 'getting round' to 'overcoming' or similar as the first term suggests an actual, physical barrier rather than a psychological barrier

Methods - Use the term 'Deprivation' rather than 'SES' in your labels of areas. Social Economic Status reflects individual economic/social circumstances, but you measured area-based deprivation. These are different measures and the use of SES in the labels confuses this.

Methods - you do not state when this research was carried out - the months and year of fieldwork should be added

Methods Page 7 - how were the focus groups selected? Were these selected by the teacher/friendship groups/were they from the same class/randomly? This would have an impact on how children reacted in the focus group

You do not suggest how you made these focus groups suitable for the age group involved. What actions were taken to be able to work with this age group successfully - changes to terminology, reflective activities, ice breakers, more control/steering from FG facilitators, smaller group, managing power differences etc are all commonly discussed in research with children

Discretionary Revisions
Discussion - pg 17 - Discussion of the weather - Suggestions might also include investigations into how children may overcome the barrier of bad weather. This may be alternative spaces to play - indoors or sheltered, the correct clothing, etc

It is not clear from the results presented whether the children chose not to go out in the rain or whether their parents prevented them from going out in bad weather.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests