Author's response to reviews

Title: What do parents think about parental participation in school-based interventions on energy balance-related behaviours? A qualitative study in 4 countries

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Version: 2 Date: 17 October 2011

Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Editor,

We thank you for considering publication of our manuscript ‘What do parents think about parental participation in school-based interventions on energy balance-related behaviours? A qualitative study in 4 countries’ (MS 1870900053571332) in the journal of BMC Public Health. We thank the reviewers for their valuable comments which enabled us to further improve our paper.

We separately responded to each of the comments made by the reviewers and indicated the changes we incorporated by highlighting them in the manuscript.

We hope that these changes made our paper acceptable for publication in the journal of BMC Public Health.

Sincerely yours,

Wendy Van Lippevelde

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Reviewer's report 1

We would like to thank the reviewer for the valuable comments on ‘What do parents think about parental participation in school-based interventions on energy balance-related behaviours? A qualitative study in 4 countries’

Please find below our point-by-point reply to the comments and suggestions made.

Title: ‘What do parents think about parental participation in school-based interventions on energy balance-related behaviours? A qualitative study in 4 countries’

Version: 1 Date: 8 July 2011

Reviewer number: 1

Reviewer's report:

Comments to the Author

Is the question posed by the authors well defined? YES
2. Are the methods appropriate and well described? YES
3. Are the data sound? YES
4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition? YES
5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data? I think discussion could be more precise in terms of the novelty of this study. Authors frequently repeat result section.

Answer:

We adapted the discussion section in order to make it more novel and concise. We tried to limit the repetitions of the result section and we added references to the literature concerning parental involvement in children’s academic achievements [35,36], as well as a link to the Self-Determination theory [41].
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
8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found? YES
9. Is the writing acceptable? In my opinion, this manuscript should be accepted. However, it needs a reformulation in the discussion section.

Answer:
The discussion was reformulated (see answer remark 5).
Reviewer's report 2

Please find below our point-by-point reply to the comments and suggestions made.

Title: ‘What do parents think about parental participation in school-based interventions on energy balance-related behaviours? A qualitative study in 4 countries’

Version: 1 Date: 8 July 2011

Reviewer number: 2

Reviewer's report:

Comments to the Author

- Major Compulsory Revisions
  a) The description of the groups on the second paragraph on Methods, is not related with the information on table 1.

  On participant recruitment the first group is the one with parents with high involvement in parent committees, while on the table 1 is a Involvement (don’t specify if high or low) and a medium-high SES. Second group was described as a low interest in nutrition, PA and SB group, whereas on the table 1 is a high involved and a medium-high SES. The third group was a group with parents with different SES backgrounds and different levels of involvement in schools activities, however on the table 1 has a low/medium SES (no reference about involvement). The last group included parents from low and medium SES backgrounds, meanwhile on the table 1 is described as a group with low interest and low-medium SES.

  Answer:
  We adapted table I in order to make it more conform and related to the information about participant recruitment in the methods section.
Table 1 Overview of the focus group participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus group 1 (high involved)</th>
<th>Gender (%women)</th>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>SES</th>
<th>N° of participants per group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus group 2 (low interest)</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>29-55</td>
<td>Low-medium</td>
<td>2-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus group 3 (mixed SES/involvement)</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>35-49</td>
<td>Medium-high</td>
<td>8-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus group 4 (low/medium SES)</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>25-47</td>
<td>Low-medium</td>
<td>5-7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b) **On the text, several times the authors referred a lower SES group (e.g. on the subtitle “Facilitating factors of parental participation in school-based intervention activities”, first and second paragraph). Should be changed to lower/medium SES?**

**Answer:**
We changed reference to the ‘lower SES’ parents into ‘low/medium SES’ parents in the text.

c) **Discussion, second paragraph – The authors referred that “No clear differences in opinions and preferences were found between parents with different SES or involvement in school activities indicating a general agreement on the issues among all parents.” The results presented on the manuscript do not support this statement. Many times the authors reported that some focus groups had different ideas.**

**Answer:**
As family income and education have been found to be related to parental involvement [20], we tried to find consistent differences in the opinions and preferences between parents with different socio-economic status and/or involvement in school activities when conducting the content analyses of the focus group results. However, we could not draw strong conclusions about specific differences between low/medium SES and medium/high groups, and between high involved, mixed involved (both low, medium and high involved) and parents with little interest because no statements were consistent across all similar groups in all countries. We only found some small differences, for example when some parents of a certain group (e.g. low interest group) had the same opinion in several countries or when certain groups within
one country differed; these differences were stated in the result section. However, we think that no strong statements could be made based on this information.


d) The purpose of this study pretends to get insight into the determinants of and perspectives on parental participation in school-based interventions on energy balance-related behaviours. The conclusion also focuses this aspect. However, the authors also had studied home-based activities. Should not be also a purpose of this study?

Answer:
Via the focus groups, we tried to learn more about the opinions and perspectives of parents concerning parental involvement in school interventions including both school-based and home-based activities. However, maybe this was not completely clear from the text. Therefore, we tried to make this more clear throughout the text by for example changing ‘parental involvement in school-based interventions’ into ‘parental involvement in school interventions’.

e) In conclusions on the abstract, the authors refer that “Parents want to be involved in activities related to energy-balanced behaviours if this implies ‘doing things together’ with their child at school or at home.” However, when the authors present the results about the motivation to parents participate in school-based interventions, Hungarian and Norwegian parents reported not wanting to be involved in promotion of healthy eating, and the majority of parents (Belgium, Hungary, and Norway) mentioned being not motivated to participate in activities to promote PA and SB. Will not be in contradiction?

Answer:
Other studies [17,18] made already clear that not all parents are motivated to participate in school interventions and also in our study many parents indeed indicated that they are not very motivated to be involved in these kind of activities. However, via the focus groups we
wanted to get more insight in how we could motivate parents to participate. We did this by asking them which factors would facilitate their participation and, in contrast, which factors would hinder this. In addition, we asked which activities were most preferred. Through this research we tried to gather some suggestions for the development of future parental modules in school-based interventions. Based on the parents’ opinions, including the not-motivated parents, we could induce that interactive and practical activities together with their child are most likely to get parents involved. From this perspective, we do not think that this is a contradiction. We only wanted to learn more about the reasons why parents would or would not participate, and the opinion of both motivated as not-motivated parents was helpful in this. Nevertheless, we agree that involving parents remains challenging given the limited amount of motivation within parents.

f) The scarce number of elements in some of the focus groups (some groups included only 2 persons) should also be considered a limitation of the study.

*Answer:* We agree with the reviewer and added this limitation (added text is marked in bold):

**Limitations of this study** were the failure to form focus groups with only low SES parents despite our efforts to engage these parents, as well as the low number of participants in some focus groups involving parents with little interest.

- **Minor Essential Revisions**
  a) Results – third and eight paragraph should not be aligned (advance the same space used on the others paragraphs).

*Answer:* Adaptation is made.

b) Results – change the type of letter on the sub title “Promotion of physical and prevention of sedentary behaviour”

*Answer:*
We are not certain what the reviewer means with this remark. The type of letter on the subtitle is the same as other subtitles and is in accordance with the journal’s guidelines according to us.

c) References – on the 12rd one, title of the paper should be in bold and the name of the journal in italic.

Answer:
The reference was adapted:

- Discretionary Revisions

a) On Methods in the Abstract, could change SES for social economic status (will help to understand the lector).

Answer:
We changed this in the method section:
A variation in parental socio-economic status (SES) and parental school involvement was taken into account when recruiting the parents.

b) Conclusion –Should emphasize that the findings are specific for the sample collected in these four countries because of very important limitations that the authors reported

Answer:
We added the following sentence at the beginning of the conclusion:
Based on this study, the following conclusions could be drawn. However, given the limitations of the recruitment in this study, these findings are not generally representative for all European countries.
Remarks editor

The Associate Editor wishes to pass on the following comments:
We also need you to make the following changes:

1. The Aims of the study should be under background section of abstract and not under a separate 'Purpose' heading

Answer:
We added the information concerning the purpose of the study to the background section.

2. Experimental research that is reported in the manuscript must have been performed with the approval of an appropriate ethics committee. Research carried out on humans must be in compliance with the Helsinki Declaration (http://www.wma.net/e/policy/b3.htm), and any experimental research on animals must follow internationally recognized guidelines. A statement to this effect must appear in the Methods section of the manuscript, including the name of the body which gave approval, with a reference number where appropriate.

Please specify the names of the ethics committees which granted approval in your manuscript.

Answer:
We added the following sentences to the Methods section:

Ethical approval was asked and granted in the different countries by the Ethical Committee of Ghent University (Belgium), the National Scientific Council and Research Ethical Committee (Hungary), and the Ethical committee of the Hospital of Aragón (Spain). Ethical approval of the Regional Medical Ethics committee in Norway was not necessary.

3. Please revise your manuscript so that it conforms to RATS guidelines (Details of these guidelines can be found at http://www.biomedcentral.com/info/ifora/rats,) and please indicate in your cover letter how you have done this.
**Answer:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R</th>
<th>Relevance of study question</th>
<th>Is the research question interesting?</th>
<th>Research question explicitly stated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer:</strong></td>
<td>We changed the last paragraph of the introduction: The present study is part of the ENERGY project and describes the focus group research that was executed with parents in four countries (Belgium, Hungary, Norway and Spain) to explore the parents’ perceptions about parental involvement in school-based obesity prevention interventions, including preferred activities, and motivators and barriers of parental participation. In addition, the following research question was also included to explore differences in parent-perceived school health promotion practices between countries: ‘what are parents’ opinions about general parental involvement and communication, school policy concerning health promotion and the role of schools and parents in obesity prevention’. The focus group research further aimed to involve parents from different socio-economic classes and with different degree of parental involvement in school activities.</td>
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| **Answer:** | In the introduction, we give a rational for the research questions. The justification in short words: both parents and schools play an important role in children’s life and also have a big influence on their behaviours[5,6]. Moreover, school-based interventions to prevent obesity have been successful[7,8]. Despite of the fact that there is no conclusive evidence about the effectiveness of parental involvement, it appears to be of major importance to include them given the relation between several parenting practices and children’s health behaviours. However, involving parents remains challenging, therefore, it is important to identify motivators, facilitators and barriers of parental involvement since these studies are lacking. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>Appropriateness of qualitative method</th>
<th>Study design described and justified e.g., why was a particular method (i.e., interviews) chosen?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer:</strong></td>
<td>We added the following paragraph to the first paragraph of the method section (the added text was marked in bold): Focus group research took place in 4 European countries (Belgium, Norway, Hungary, and Spain). By using focus groups, it was possible to elicit a range of perspectives from parents of ten- to twelve-year-old children about parental involvement in school-based obesity prevention. Focus groups were chosen as a method for several reasons. This focus group research was set up as a first step in the ENERGY intervention development. For convenience purposes, qualitative research was chosen to collect information faster. Moreover, the topics included in the focus groups were non-sensitive and were easily discussed by the participants. The flexible questioning and synergetic effect of group conversations increases the likelihood that data and ideas will be produced that would remain uncovered with other methods (e.g. individual interviews). From the interactions between participants, more insight is often gained into how people think and talk about the topic under investigation. Furthermore, focus groups are valuable to generate ideas about possible effective intervention strategies.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>T</th>
<th>Transparency of procedures</th>
<th>Criteria for selecting the study sample justified and explained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Answer:** | Extensive information about the participant recruitment is included in the methods section under the subtitle participant recruitment. | theoretical: based on pre conceived or emergent theory  
volunteer: feasibility, hard-to-reach groups |
A diverse group of participants was realized through purposive sampling, parents with different SES background, different involvement in school activities, different interest in promotion of physical activity and healthy eating. Parents’ participation was voluntary, however, to motivate hard-to-reach groups incentives were used in some countries.

We also added the following information into the first paragraph of the method section:

A protocol was developed requiring that each country had to conduct at least four focus group interviews with parents of ten- to twelve-year-olds based on variation in parental socio-economic status (SES) and extent of parental involvement in school activities since family income and education are related to parental involvement [20].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recruitment</th>
<th>Details of how recruitment was conducted and by whom</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Was recruitment conducted using appropriate methods?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Is the sampling strategy appropriate?</td>
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</table>

**Answer:**
Under the subtitle **participant recruitment**, details about the recruitment were stated:

*The recruitment of parents occurred mostly through schools and through networks of the researchers. Parents of low SES groups were recruited through schools in deprived city areas or through organizations that work with this specific group. Parents with a low interest in nutrition and PA were recruited through schools and personal contacts and the selection was based on the daily experiences with the parents (e.g. the food brought to the school by the children, the lack of interest in health promotion initiatives).*

*Could there be selection bias?* Details of who chose not to participate and why

**Answer:**
There could be selection bias because participants were not randomly selected. We do not have information about which parent did not participate and why. The aim of the study was to gain more insights in the opinions of parents concerning parental involvement in obesity prevention programs at school. Therefore, representative samples of participants were less important. This was also added as a limitation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data collection</th>
<th>Method(s) outlined and examples given (e.g., interview questions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Was collection of data systematic and comprehensive?</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

**Answer:**
Under the subtitle **standardization and quality control** information about the data collection procedure was described. A protocol was used to obtain standardization in procedures across all countries. Examples of interview questions are included in appendix A.

*Are characteristics of the study group and setting clear?* Study group and setting clearly described

**Answer:**
Setting and study groups were clearly described in the first part of the method section (introduction method and participant recruitment section), and more specific characteristics of the participants were included under the subtitle **participants** in the result section and in table I.

*Why and when was data collection stopped, and is this reasonable?* End of data collection justified and described

**Answer:**
We added the following sentence to the method section (under subtitle participant recruitment):

*When representatives of all target groups (high involved, low interest, mixed SES and involvement and low/medium SES) were included in the focus groups, no further groups were recruited.*

| Role of researchers | |
|---------------------||
| Is the researcher(s) appropriate? How might they bias (good and bad) the conduct of the study and results? | |
| Do the researchers occupy dual roles (clinician and researcher)? Are the ethics of this discussed? Do the researcher(s) critically examine their own influence on the formulation of the research question, data collection, and interpretation? | |

**Answer:**
The researcher of the coordinating center formulated the research question in collaboration with the other study centres participating in the focus group research. A protocol was developed including information about the procedures that needed to be followed in each country concerning data collection and data analysis. This information can be found in the manuscript under subtitles **standardization and quality control** and **data analyses**. The different researchers of the study centres conducted the focus group research in their own country and wrote summary reports based on standardized templates, which were then compared and summarized by a researcher in the coordination study centre and afterwards the international summary was reviewed and validated by the researchers of the other study centres. Therefore, we think that researcher bias is limited.

| Ethics | |
|--------||
| Was informed consent sought and granted? Were participants’ anonymity and confidentiality ensured? | Informed consent process explicitly and clearly detailed Anonymity and confidentiality discussed

**Answer:**
The following sentence was added at the end of the text concerning standardization and quality control:
In each study centre, focus group interviews were led by a trained moderator facilitating the group discussions accompanied by a co-moderator taking notes during the sessions. After each focus group session the moderator and co-moderator debriefed by summing up the most interesting discussions, describing the members of the focus group and noting any particular circumstances that might have influenced the discussions. Informed consent which included that study resulted were handled anonymous and confidential (oral or written) was obtained from all participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Was approval from an appropriate ethics committee received?</th>
<th>Ethics approval cited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</table>

The following text was added to the Methods section:
Ethical approval was asked and granted in the different countries by the Ethical Committee of Ghent University (Belgium), the National Scientific Council and Research Ethical Committee (Hungary), and the Ethical committee of the Hospital of Aragón (Spain). Ethical approval of the Regional Medical Ethics committee in Norway was not necessary.

S | Soundness of interpretive approach
---|----------------------------------
Analysis
- Is the type of analysis appropriate for the type of study?
  * thematic: exploratory, descriptive, hypothesis generating
  * framework: e.g., policy
  * constant comparison/grounded theory: theory generating, analytical

Analytic approach described in depth and justified

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators of quality:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description of how themes were derived from the data (inductive or deductive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of alternative explanations being sought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis and presentation of negative or deviant cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of the basis on which quotes were chosen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-quantification when appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illumination of context and/or meaning, richly detailed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Via the focus groups, we sought to improve our insight into parents’ perspectives about parental involvement in school-based obesity prevention interventions. To our knowledge, no studies investigated this yet. Therefore, this research can be seen as exploratory and descriptive. Detailed information about the used analysis can be found under the subtitle data-analyses.

Are the interpretations clearly presented and adequately supported by the evidence?

Are quotes used and are these appropriate and effective?

Identifiers of quality: Description of how themes were derived from the data (inductive or deductive) Evidence of alternative explanations being sought Analysis and presentation of negative or deviant cases Description of the basis on which quotes were chosen Semi-quantification when appropriate Illumination of context and/or meaning, richly detailed


Since this was explorative and descriptive qualitative research, it was not applicable to search for alternative explanations or present negative cases. We tried to give an overview of the opinions of the parents concerning different topics including providing similarities and differences between countries and different focus groups when possible.

Findings presented with reference to existing theoretical and empirical literature, and how they contribute

To our knowledge, this is the first study that specifically investigated the opinions of parents concerning parental involvement in school-based obesity prevention interventions. So it is not completely possible to compare our results with previous studies, however, we did try to compare the results with studies that include some aspects that were investigated in this study. For example there are studies that investigated what parents think about healthy behaviours linked to obesity, or what they think that there role is in obesity prevention. When no other qualitative studies were available, we
try to compare the study results with quantitative studies. This is included in the discussion section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are the limitations thoughtfully considered?</th>
<th>Strengths and limitations explicitly described and discussed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer:</strong></td>
<td>We think the limitations and strengths of the study are adequately described at the end of the discussion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Is the manuscript well written and accessible? | Evidence of following guidelines (format, word count)  
Detail of methods or additional quotes contained in appendix  
Written for a health sciences audience |
<table>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer:</strong></td>
<td>We tried to write the manuscript as clear and accessible as possible.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Are red flags present? these are common features of ill conceived or poorly executed qualitative studies, are a cause for concern, and must be viewed critically. They might be fatal flaws, or they may result from lack of detail or clarity. | Grounded theory: not a simple content analysis but a complex, sociological, theory generating approach  
Jargon: descriptions that are trite, pat, or jargon filled should be viewed sceptically  
Over interpretation: interpretation must be grounded in "accounts" and semi-quantified if possible or appropriate  
Seems anecdotal, self evident: may be a superficial analysis, not rooted in conceptual framework or linked to previous knowledge, and lacking depth  
Consent process thinly discussed: may not have met ethics requirements  
Doctor-researcher: consider the ethical implications for patients and the bias in data collection and interpretation |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer:</strong></td>
<td>We do not think that there are any red flags present. However, the focus group research in this article is explorative and descriptive and aims to give an overview of parents’ perspectives concerning parental involvement in school-based obesity prevention programs including motivating, facilitating and hindering factors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>