Reviewer’s report

Title: Why parents refuse childhood vaccination: a qualitative study with the use of online focus groups

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Reviewer: Jan Hontelez

Reviewer’s report:

Harmsen et al present a qualitative study into the reasons for refusing childhood vaccinations in the Netherlands. The paper covers a current topic, and the results are relevant to public health researchers and policy makers in the Netherlands as well as other countries.

One of the major concerns raised at the initial submission of the manuscript, informed consent, has been adequately dealt with by the authors. Procedures followed were correctly and permission was obtained from the ethics committee of the Maastricht University.

The chosen methodology is sound, interesting, and novel. Internet based focus group discussions could be applied to other public health problems, and this paper provides a nice example. I only have minor textual comments and suggestions. The paper may benefit from a professional text editor to enhance flow.

Major compulsory revisions
n.a.

Minor essential revisions

Introduction:

Be careful with industrialized countries, it is a definition that means ‘countries that have an economy based on industry’ and includes many Southeast Asian countries. Better would be ‘high income countries’?

Although obvious, first sentence of the background could use a key reference

Last sentence of the background, remove the comma between “NIP” and “when”

Second paragraph, first sentence: the claim that parents have become more critical deserves a reference, or the claim should be tuned down a little and say that many parents are critical

Last paragraph of the background: The fact that a qualitative study has never been done is not a reason in itself to do the study. I suggest to lose the sentence, and state the methodology more clearly, e.g. “we performed internet based focus group discussions with (..)”
Methods:

What are “prospective participants”? Better to just say “participants” or “study participants”?

First sentence of the “study participants” needs rewriting as it is currently confusing. Selection criteria and database description should be separated into 2 sentences. e.g.: “(..) randomly selected from Praeventis, the vaccination database in the Netherlands. Participants were selected based on the vaccination status of (..)”

Study section in methods, last paragraph, please move the first sentence to the end of the paragraph

Same paragraph: “informational needs” is vague, could you please expand a bit more?

Results:

It would be clearer to the reader if you already labelled the different themes in the methods section

Discussion:

8th paragraph: “earlier studies have contended” does not seem to be correct here.

I think the authors mean “other studies have shown that”.

Another limitation that could be mentioned is that we do not gain any quantitative information from this study. Of course, this is inherent to a qualitative design, but should be mentioned in the limitations, possible followed by a suggestion to do quantitative research into the frequency of occurrence of the most important themes/reasons for non-vaccination in the population. Although quantitative research into this has been done before (Bults et al, vaccine 2011; Hontelez et al vaccine 2011; Paulussen et al, Vaccine 2006), these studies were never informed by qualitative data on beliefs and concerns in the population.

Discretionary revisions

n.a.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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

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