Author's response to reviews

Title: How do couples influence each other's physical activity behaviours in retirement: an exploratory qualitative study

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Dr. Salo,

How do couples influence each other’s physical activity behaviours in retirement: an exploratory qualitative study

Thank you for your comments on this paper. Changes made to the manuscript in response to these comments are highlighted in yellow and responses to the points raised by the reviewers are presented below. The authors confirm that this qualitative study adheres to the RATS guidelines on qualitative research.

Yours sincerely
David Ogilvie on behalf of the authors

Editor's Comments:

"As the Reviewers point out, this manuscript is about an important and timely topic, i.e. identifying that spousal support may help in promoting physical activity after retirement. The methods are appropriate and the conclusions are sound. However, the Reviewers suggested some minor revisions that need to be addressed before this manuscript can be accepted for publication."

Additional Editorial Requests:
1.) Please confirm in your covering letter that your study adheres to the RATS guidelines on qualitative research (http://www.biomedcentral.com/ifora/rats), and add a statement to that effect in the revised manuscript.

We adhered to the RATS guidelines in this qualitative study and have added an appropriate statement to the manuscript and covering letter.

**Reviewer's report**

**Reviewer:** Merja Rantakokko

Minor Essential Revisions

1. In the abstract you mention that the 14 participants…from the existing EPIC-Norfolk study…, but in the methods you write that at least one member of each couple was from this study, not all.

   We have amended the abstract as requested, stating that at least one member of each couple was recruited from the existing EPIC cohort.

2. Introduction: You start with promotion and health benefits of physical activity, but you do not study this. In addition, referring to different diseases is really far from the design of the present study. This paragraph could be moved to later in the introduction or removed totally; at least I suggest not starting with this.

   We have moved the section on health benefits of physical activity to the last paragraph (page 5) of the introduction as suggested by the reviewer.

3. Definition of physical activity is lacking, and should be added.

   We have added the following description of physical activity on page 9. ‘As we were interested in participants’ perceptions and concepts of physical activity in retirement, we did not provide a specific definition of physical activity but asked them to define physical activity in their own terms. Consequently, participants included a wide range of activities of daily living such as exercise and leisure time activities, activities in and around the home, work-related activity, and active travel such as walking or cycling for transport.

4. Methods: How much data you finally had? How many transcribed pages? This should be mentioned in the methods.

   We have included a statement to the effect that we analysed 130 pages of transcript on page 11, as suggested by the reviewer.

5. p. 10, “the second author (CG) analysed three transcripts…” Was there any disagreements between these analyses and how these were handled?

   We have added on pages 10-11 that the aim of the triangulation was to provide different perspectives on the textual data and ensure a deeper understanding of the data. There were very high levels of agreement in the coding of the main categories and high levels of agreement in the
detailed coding between the two researchers. Any minor disagreements were resolved in the process of discussion to deepen the analysis.

6. Results: Did the participants bring out any negative comments? Did the spouse restrict their participation to physical activity? you briefly mention something in the discussion, but I was wondering whether it would be important to bring this up already at the results.

We would like to draw the reviewer’s attention to pages 15-16 of the results section. While there were no instances in which spouses restricted each other’s physical activity behaviour, tensions around physical activity occurred in two couples (Ralph/Gwen; Terry/Louise). As described on page 15, the inactive Ralph feared that the harmony within his couple relationship would be disturbed if his wife started to engage in competitive sports. On page 16, Louise describes how the high levels of physical activity of her husband are a frequent sources of frustration for her because ‘it interferes with something that matters a bit’. Terry did not sympathise and stressed that ‘you [wife] learned very early on thou shalt not become between a man and his sport, don’t do it, if you want a relationship to work you don’t do it.’ In response to the reviewer’s comment, we have added (on page 15) one sentence stating that we could not find any instances in which participants attempted to restrict each other physical activity participation.

7. Discussion: Couples were interviewed together, and even though researchers feel that the couples were able to share their thoughts freely, they still may not say negative comments of their spouses. I think this is possible limitation of the study, and should be in the discussion.

In response to the reviewer’s comment we have included on page 24 a statement that all couples seemed very comfortable in the interview and openly discussed and criticised each other’s physical activity behaviour. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that additional separate interviews might have drawn out some additional information including further negative comments on the spouses physical activity behaviour.

Discretionary Revisions
8. The results section would benefit from a figure presenting the main and subthemes.

We have included a figure presenting the main themes and subthemes as suggested.

Reviewer's report

Reviewer: John Schuna

2. Page 21, Paragraph 1: The sentence “Similarly, Tucker et al. [2] reported that a partner’s modelling of favourable health behaviours was an effective strategy to motivate health behaviour change in their spouse.” appears to have an incorrect reference? The paper by Tucker et al. does not appear to deal with the topic of partner modelling in any context.

We thank the reviewer for noticing this mistake and have corrected the reference accordingly (Franks et al. instead of Tuckers et al.), page 21.
3. Page 23, Paragraph 1: “Participants seemed to feel relaxed and at ease with the interview situation and said that they enjoyed taking the young woman from the University.” Should “taking” be “talking to”? We have corrected this mistake.

4. Page 28, Reference 58: Appears there is some form of formatting error with the references as the last reference (58) is duplicated in a smaller text version without numbering.

We thank the reviewer for noticing this formatting error and have corrected it.

Discretionary Revisions:
5. Page 13, last sentence: Replacing “maintain” with “remain” might improve clarity in this sentence?

We have amended the sentence as requested (now page 14, second paragraph).