Reviewer's report

Title: Preventive physiotherapy interventions for back care in children and adolescents: A meta-analysis

Version: 3 Date: 20 April 2012

Reviewer: Wim Van den Noortgate

Reviewer's report:

The meta-analysis is of a good methodological quality. I only have some small comments, detailed below. The manuscript is however at some places poorly written (especially the abstract).

Details:

P4, first alinea: instead of simply reporting the highest prevalence, the authors could present the range of values found in the literature.

p. 7: It seems more logical to me to discuss the selection criteria before discussing the literature search (because keywords also depend on the inclusion criteria). The list of inclusion criteria should further also reflect the main focus of the paper (‘physiotherapy’, ‘back care’, ‘preventive’)

Sixteen out of the 881 references were withheld. I suggest that the authors include a description of the main reasons of exclusion of the other references, if possible with numbers. The figure in the Additional File 3 does this only for the last selection round, based on the full text.

p. 8: the authors state that also nonpublished papers are included. It is however not clear from the description of the search procedure what strategies were used to find these papers (and whether the efforts are sufficient).

p. 15: I am not convinced that there is no publication bias based on the nonsignificant results of the ANOVA. Differences between both mean effect sizes are very large, and maybe not significant simply because of the small group of unpublished studies. I would be more assured that their results are not biased if the authors show that they did enough efforts to find also nonpublished studies.

p. 16-17-18 for the Q-tests, also the value of Q as well as the degrees of freedom should be reported (also giving information about the number of categories being compared). For the continuous variables, the regression coefficients should be reported. To help the reader getting a clear overview of the moderator effects, a table (with tested moderator variables, Q values & df’s or regression coefficients & standard errors, and p-values) would be very helpful.

Because the effect of moderator variables is tested for each variable separately, it would be interesting to get an insight in the relation between the moderators. It is possible that a moderator ‘effect’ that is found for one property in fact is due to the correlation of this property with a real moderator variable.
Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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