Reviewer's report

**Title:** Challenges to Obtaining Parental Permission for child participation in a School-based Waterpipe Tobacco Smoking Prevention Intervention in Qatar

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 2 June 2014

**Reviewer:** Divya Rajaraman

**Reviewer's report:**

Overall
Thank you for the opportunity to review this very interesting article. The data and analysis presented in this manuscript make an important contribution to discussions on:
- the process and challenges of obtaining parental informed consent in school-based research
- determinants of research participation across different populations and settings
- increasing research literacy in the Arab world

The writing is very clear, and paper presents relevant data with useful suggestions for strengthening the process of parental consent in future school-based research, especially in settings where research literacy is low.

I have some suggestions for change with regard to structure of the manuscript, reporting of results and scope of the discussion, as detailed below.

**Major Compulsory Revisions**

1. While the authors focus on reporting challenges in parental participation, I would suggest broadening the scope of the paper to 'assessing parental consent for children’s participation in a school-based waterpipe tobacco smoking study’, and to include bi-variate/multi-variate analysis of whether returning the forms/providing consent was associated with type of school, nationality/language spoken, education level of parents, gender of the parent who returned the form, gender of the child etc. This These are potentially important determinants of parental consent, and findings from a preliminary analysis could guide further analysis of the qualitative data. Including this analysis as a table in the Results section may strengthen the analysis and conclusions.

2. Table 1 is meant to demonstrate that there were no statistically significant differences between schools that provided permission to contact parents versus those that did not: however, the small sample size may limit the possibility to do meaningful statistical analysis of differences for this question. The authors should consider whether this is a limitation in this analysis.

3. The methods section was not very easy to follow, and seemed to miss some important points. I would suggest some restructuring as well as changes in sub-section titles. These could include, for example: Study setting, study
population and recruitment, sources of data, data collection, data analysis, and ethical review. A clear distinction between the two phases of the (analysis of informed consent forms and follow up qualitative interviews) when describing the methods may be helpful.

4. Gender of parent or child may play a role in determining parental consent – the authors should elaborate on this issue in the description of recruitment, analysis of response/permission with regard to research participations, and in the discussion.

5. Considering that the literature mentions that passive permission may be more effective for increasing parental permission in comparison to active permission, it would be useful for the authors to discuss why they chose an opt-in rather than opt-out approach.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

6. Line 167: ‘sms’ should be spelled out or replaced with ‘text message’

7. Line 208: ‘kids’ should be changed to ‘children’ or ‘adolescents’

8. Lines 223-4: The authors mention that there were no thematic differences between the two groups in responses to questions: how was this assessed?

9. Line 226: The authors state that none of the refusals for participation was due to language barriers: how was this assessed?

10. Line 275: “the majority of parents mentioned that they consider themselves to have the same income of parents of other children who attend their school” – I’m not sure how useful this statement is, as it doesn’t really tell us anything about the potential variation in socio-economic status of the parents between schools, or actual SES of the parents. Using the schools fees may be a better proxy for assessing SES here.

11. Line 383: Typographic error: Change ‘erve’ to ‘serve’

12. Table 1: include the ‘N’ for schools in the second and third column labels. In the second row , first columns, ‘Mix’ could be changed to ‘co-educational’? Consider reworking this able for easier interpretation

13. Table 2.

i) Some of the codes/themes overlap, for example ‘opening the child’s eyes to a topic he/she should not know about’ and ‘child too young for topic.’ Other codes are not very informative, for example ‘personal reasons.’ Recognizing the limitations of working with data in an open-ended self-filled permission/consent form, it would be useful for the authors to explain how the codes were generated, and difficulties in coding and implications for the analysis.

ii) The table should be reviewed for typographic errors/language consistency

iii) It would be preferable to list the codes by frequency of response.

iv) The frequencies add up to 100% - does this mean that parents could not list more than one reason for non-participation?
Discretionary Revisions

14. The fifth paragraph in the introduction (lines 110-118) may be better placed within the description of setting/study population in the methods section.

15. I suggest including a description of study design/methods in the last paragraph of the introduction section (eg. analysis of informed written feedback in informed consent forms and semi-structured qualitative telephone and in-person interviews).

16. While the paper focuses on parental consent, it would be useful to mention issues around children’s assent/consent in research as well (see Cheah and Parker 2014, BMC Medical Ethics), in the introduction and/or discussion.

17. Line 392-3: the authors discuss the possibility of information sessions for schools - they could also consider that these may be done in conjunction with other school events such as parent teacher meetings, school performances etc.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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