Reviewer’s report

Title: Infant formula feeding practices and the role of advice and support: an exploratory qualitative study

Version: 0 Date: 31 Jul 2017

Reviewer: Hazel Ann Smith

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to read your manuscript. You have some interesting data which will be of interest to those researching infant feeding but I do request that changes are made to your paper before I can recommend it for publication. Each page has two different sets of line numbers. The line numbers I am referring to are in the second column, closest to the text.

- Use of language:

This is not an excessive list, I am only highlighting a few examples:

1) In both the abstract and the paper you have stated that a you have mothers from 'diverse areas across Australia' (page 3, line 9); 'This sample had a diverse experience with formula' (page 8, line 18); 'Strengths of this study include the recruitment of a diverse sample of mothers from across a number of locations in Australia which provides rich' (page 23, lines 15& 16) and 'include participants from a many diverse geographical locations' (page 24, line 2).

I would remove the word 'diverse' as all but one of your mothers come from the east coast of Australia. Also, 54% of your sample are from a major city followed by 37% being from Inner Regional and nearly half (46%) have a tertiary education. Your infant formula feeding groups (please see comments in the manuscript section) are nearly evenly split but all we know is when they, roughly, started to receive infant formula. No information is provided on breastfeeding history or if any infant was ever put to the breast.

2) On page 7, line 9 ('An exploratory semi-structured interview with probing questions') I would remove the word 'probing'. This is subjective and you have not provided any evidence of pilot work or the reliability or validity of your questions.

3) At times you refer to your sample as 'parents' and at other times as 'mothers'. Please only use the term 'mothers' as you did not speak to any other care giver.
4) On page 3, line 1 you state 'what factors may influence this practice is therefore be important'. I would remove 'be'

5) On page 4, line 10 I would replace 'intensity' with duration

- Abstract

1) On page 2, lines 22-25 you state 'Yet, very little is known about parents' infant formula feeding practices. It is plausible that certain modifiable practices may put children at higher risk of developing overweight or obesity, for example higher protein content formula'. The protein content of the infant formula is not something mothers can control so it is not a modifiable practice for mothers. I would remove the higher protein content as an example, you collected some information on type of infant formula but you didn't collect any information on protein content or how much formula your study sample is offered. Modifiable practices include the amount of infant formula given to parents and how often they are often infant formula.

2) On page 3, lines 14-16 you state that barriers exist to accessing HCP support but do not state what those barriers are. On line 16 you say 'One barrier may' this suggests to the reader that this isn't a result if you have used the word 'may'. Only include results that you have from your dataset.

- Manuscript

1) Background (page 4, lines 16-24). I agree that the Early Protein Hypothesis is important when discussing infant feeding but for your paper you state that the aim is to 'explore parents' formula feeding practices and the factors influencing this practice, with an exploratory focus on the range of different sources, including formal health professional advice, and the relative impact these may have.' EPH is not that relevant, for your paper, compared to mothers understating the cues of their infants when hungry, how much and how often to feed their child…….

2) Background (page 5, line 4). You open up the paragraph by stating 'Despite this evidence…….' but you have only include 2 papers (on page 4, line 24) on responsive feeding

3) Background (page 5, lines 18-20). What infant formula practices are you talking about? In the preceding sentences you talk about how interventional studies on breastfeeding support improve duration of same but with formula feeding are you talking about how the formula is made, how it is stored, how parents pick infant formula, how often they fed their child……?
4) Background (page 6, line 5). Need to state what you consider to be 'modifiable formula feeding practices'.

5) Methods (page 6, line 15) if there is a website for BFF I would include it here. Some readers (including myself!) will try and source more information on the outputs from your centre relevant to this paper.

6) Methods (page 7, line 2) how did you 'purposefully sample' your study population after they had stated they were happy to take part in your study? Did you invite parents to join and then exclude them if they did not meet your criteria? Or did you draw up your study sample list and then invite them to join (if so, how did you correct if one group was under-represented)?

7) Methods: Other than being in the BFF study did you apply any other inclusion/ exclusion criteria?

8) Methods/ethics: how was consent recorded?

9) Methods (page 7, line 9): Need to state how you developed the semi-structured interview. How do you know it was probing? What about reliability or validity?

10) Methods (page 7, line 6-7): You have anonymised the text here but have un-anonymised on page 25

11) Methods (page 8, lines 10 & 11): Need to very clearly define your infant formula groups and how you came to group them the way you did.

12) Results (page 8, line 14): 25/51 (49%) agreed to participate but one was excluded as infant was in the special care nursery. In your methods you did not state any exclusion criteria and to be included they needed to be part of the BFF study. Any evidence of selection bias between those that did (n=24) and those that did not (n=26) agree to take part?

13) Results: If you have any information on their breastfeeding history I would provide it. There is a difference in the infant formula feeding practices of mothers who initiated breastfeeding, to those that breastfed but supplemented in the maternity hospital and to those that never breastfed.

14) Results (page 9, lines 1-9): you have identified six themes (& one theme has 4 sub-themes) and state that the title of your aims are: 'Choice of formula - Potential power of marketing in an information vacuum'; 'Bottle preparation - mostly by the tin'; 'How much and how often'; '…on the tin, looking online and family members' informal sources'; 'Health professionals don't often talk about it!' and 'Bottle stigma' but not all these headings match what is on pages 9-18.
It is difficult to read the remaining results section as you have one heading, one page 9, 'The how and why of parents' formula feeding practices' (which is not one of your listed themes) where you talk about how parents determined how often and how much formula to offer at each feed but then on page 11 you have another section 'How much and how often' (which is one of your listed themes) and again you talk about how parents determined how often and how much formula to offer at each feed.

Results: Use the same formatting throughout the paper for theme headings - makes it easier for the reader to follow

15) Discussion: Reference studies. For example, page 18 lines 22-24, you state 'Few studies have addressed parents' formula feeding practices, and fewer still have considered which sources of information parents' use and how they perceive these as informing their formula feeding practices.' What studies are you talking about?

16) Discussion: You used a thematic analytic approach but usually grounded theory is used to develop theory and is a more inductive approach. I would add a few sentences here to explain why you picked thematic analysis instead. (I am not favouring one method over another but think it is good to highlight your reasons for how you approached your study.)

17) Discussion and Conclusion: In re-editing your paper make sure that these two sections reflect the aims, methods and results of your paper

- References

1) Reference list needs to be updated. From reading your manuscript there are more recent papers that you could have sourced. You have one journal reference from 2016 and the rest range from 1981 - 2015.

**Are the methods appropriate and well described?**
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

**Does the work include the necessary controls?**
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Unable to assess
Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Needs some language corrections before being published

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