Author’s response to reviews

Title: The influence of the maternal peer group (partner, friends, mothers’ group, family) on mothers’ attitudes to obesity-related behaviours of their children

Authors:

Adrian Cameron (adrian.cameron@deakin.edu.au)

Emma Charlton (emmalouisa@gmail.com)

Adam Walsh (adam.walsh@deakin.edu.au)

Kylie Hesketh (kylie.hesketh@deakin.edu.au)

Karen Campbell (karen.campbell@deakin.edu.au)

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Author’s response to reviews:

Dear editor,

Thank you for the chance to respond to the additional questions from the reviewers. Again, we believe that consideration of those concerns has led to a stronger paper. We have provided a point by point response to each of the questions and hope that the paper is now considered suitable for publication in BMC Pediatrics.

With regards,

Adrian Cameron on behalf of all co-authors

Editor:

- Is the questionnaire used in your study published elsewhere? If do please ensure this is clear in the text and provide a citation or link so readers may access it. If not, please can you include a blank copy of it as an additional file.

Author response: It was previously noted in the text that the questions used were purpose designed for this study. It is now noted in the text that a copy has been provided as a supplementary appendix.

Reviewer 1 – no specific comments
Reviewer 2:

- Title "on mothers' attitudes to obesity-related behaviours" - in them, or in infants? Should add "in their children" or something of the sort to the end of the Title. Also, given that much of the discussion is on behaviors in addition to attitudes, maybe this should be included in the title.

Author response: The title has been changed to include “of their children” as suggested. Given the focus of the study is questions related to maternal attitudes, we believe that the title should focus on attitudes (bearing in mind that it is attitudes toward obesity related behaviours).

- Abstract Methods: the study design and source of the data should be put at the beginning of the methods.

Author response: This change has been made.

- Abstract Results: are improved now. Should add numbers to support the statement that "more highly educated mothers rated social connections as more influential than less educated mothers." Especially since this statement is made in the conclusions as well.

Author response: Although it would be ideal to include results to support this statement, it is not a simple matter of adding in one or two numbers because of the number of behaviours (3) and the number of levels of influence (4) that this statement is based on. Because of this, and because full justification for this statement is provided in the results and Table 3, we would prefer to leave this sentence as is in the abstract.

- Results: "Attitudes toward child feeding were most likely to be influenced by mothers' group peers, followed by child physical activity." This statement is not supported by a statistical test demonstrating that the difference is not due to chance alone.

Author response: This statement is based on the results presented in Table 2, with all percentages accompanied by 95% confidence intervals that allow for direct comparisons between different influencers. It is clear from this table that this statement is based on strong statistical evidence, particularly for child feeding and activity.

- Results: The first two sentences in the second paragraph of the "Moderating Influences" section of the results (starting with "When comparing treatment and control groups…") can be combined to one sentence.
Author response: Combined, those two sentences contain 63 words. For readability, we believe that they should remain as two separate sentences. We are happy to be guided by the editor if they disagree.

- Results: Page 7 line 5: the p<0.001 for all, not <0.01

Author response: Thank you for pointing out this small error. This has been fixed now.

- Results: Why was the Peer influences and behavior section not expanded with either more data in the text or a table/figure associated with it. This could even be included as an appendix table. Generally, p values should not be placed if the accompanying data is not included. This is especially important given that much of the discussion is centered around behaviors rather than attitudes.

Author response: It is important to note that the primary focus of this paper is on peer influence (self-reported) on maternal attitudes towards behaviours. The section in question is taking this a step further and for those behaviours where data was available, is assessing whether self-reported peer influence is also associated with differences in actual child behaviours. All of the results available have been presented in this paragraph, and we therefore do not feel that this section warrants presentation of results in a table or figure. The fact that the discussion is focused on both attitudes and behaviours is not surprising since the core of this paper is focused on attitudes toward behaviours.

- Table 2 - The no-partner column: Is the influence reported there the influence of not having a partner? I don't quite understand the meaning surrounding this column. I had previously suggested this be removed. This can be left for the editors to decide if necessary.

Author response: Thank you for pointing out that confusion remained regarding this category. A footnote has been added to the table to clarify, which now reads “*Note, percentages in the column “no partner” are the percentage of respondents who reported having no partner, meaning that this question was not applicable to them”.

- Discussion: Page 13, line 32: "Education is a good measure…” This sentence did not make a lot of sense to me. Are you suggesting that because new mothers may not be actively earning income or working that education would be an appropriate surrogate measure of SES? It may be a stronger point to simply state that education has been shown to be associated with SES in all populations, including new mothers.

Author response: Thank you for pointing out that this sentence could be clearer. Yes, that is the point that we were trying to make. This sentence has been amended to now read “Education is a
better measure of socioeconomic position in new mothers than income or occupation given the impact of child-rearing on these indices”.

Discussion: Page 13 line 41: "Given the strong link…” I don't think you can say lower SES mothers have weaker social networks from the results of the present study. Rather, they seem to be less influenced by their social networks. Your results suggest that this lower influence may result in a negative impact on behaviors given your data demonstrating longer breastfeeding duration in those that were more greatly influenced.

Author response: We agree with the reviewers comment and have now changed this sentence to read: “Given the strong link between socioeconomic position and obesity-related behaviours [31], it is difficult to know whether the apparently weaker influence of social networks on attitudes of lower educated mothers are likely to be a net positive or negative influence on behaviours”. In relation to breast feeding, we do not analyse this in relation to education level, so cannot be certain about the reviewers’ statement that lower peer influence is likely to have a negative effect.

Discussion: Conclusion: "Equity should therefore be taken into consideration when contemplating obesity-prevention interventions that target these groups." I'm not sure if you mean equity in the sense of being fair and impartial or equity meaning the wealth of the family. This should be clarified. Really though, this finding warrants further evaluation. Do mothers with lower education/lower SES want to have a stronger network and just don't have the access or the time?

Author response: We agree that this sentence could have been clearer and the question of the reviewer is a valid one. That sentence has now been replaced with the following: “Research into why peer influences might be socioeconomically patterned, and the consequences of this for child behaviour is required”.

Reviewer 3 – no additional comments