Reviewer's report


Version: 2
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Reviewer: emma eyre

Reviewer's report:

The paper seeks to understand physical activity behaviours amongst black and minority ethnic groups in the UK, using meta-ethnography of qualitative studies. This is an area of great importance for public health promotion in the UK, given the growing number of ethnic groups residing in the UK or UK born. Additionally, some ethnic groups in the UK have been shown to have the lowest physical activity levels but increased risk of cardio-metabolic disease. The paper is well written throughout and seeks to draw on theoretical underpinning using the socio-ecological model. The appraisal and second and third order interpretation of the data improves the credibility of the data and is a strength of the research.

Discretionary Revisions:


The paper uses the socio-ecological model to explain barriers. This is useful as it encompasses all the levels e.g. individual, organisation etc. Do any of the other models help explain the barriers though? For example, in the paper it is described that BME individuals feel that exercise is harmful and so they don’t engage in it. The theory of planned and reasoned action would explain this behaviour also.

- Minor Essential Revisions:

Results: Perception: ‘physical activity was perceived to cause harmful effects’. As a reader it would be interesting to read about what these harmful effects were perceived to be.

Results: Perception: ‘lack of role models and poor promotion of health lifestyles
were described to explain their limited exposure in their country of origin’ Where all the people non UK born? Was this perceived in UK born? And did it depend on years of migration?

At times, terms such as ‘some BME individuals’ is used. As a reader it would be clearer if the specific ethnic groups that it relates to were stated here.

Results: cultural expectations: ‘islamic or South Asian dress codes’ and ‘by some South Asian women or muslim women’. I am not sure what the difference is between a SA vs. Islamic/muslim women. Should you refer to all sub groups of South Asians if being specific. Previously you refer to SA’s as a collective term for Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi throughout, but now separate Islamic away from this.

Results: segregation of genders: Is this for gym facilities? Classes? Or all. Also, is this only specific to ethnic groups? Or is it a gender issue? Or is this a gender issue which is further enhanced by cultural values i.e. clothing etc? The details of the findings are interesting but as a reader I was looking for deeper analysis, interpretation and understanding of issues to help inform my practice.

Results: Organisational level barriers: It is described that BME individuals are disadvantaged by lack of advertising and the failure to tackle racism. This sentence reads as if there is some real evidence (i.e. figures) to support this instead of ‘perceived’. Should this be ‘perceived’ or ‘felt’ because the results are based on qualitative views from these groups? If so, the paragraph below should also be amended to represent this.

Discussion:

1st paragraph: ‘are recognised when comparing BME groups with the majority population’ Who is this? Would it be better to be specific about the majority population.

‘Conforming to western culture……to constitute identity threat’ you then discuss how BME individuals may need to be empowered and that group exercise may increase physical activity. Given the risk of identity threat, and the point made earlier about the lack of role models etc within these cultures, would it be useful to comment that these exercise leaders may need to be culture and gender specific. For example, would a group exercise class be as effective if it was led by a white male for SA females?

Limitations are clearly stated. The inclusion of such a wide age group and all ethnic groups, while holistic is also a limitation.

As the study focuses on barriers to physical activity, the title might be better represented to include barriers in the title.

- Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

The research objective is provided. The study title suggests that the study is
about understanding behaviours in ethnic groups, whereas as a reader the objective seems to be looking for related items between qualitative studies to produce overarching concepts. Meta-ethnography is not my area of expertise, but I wonder whether the objective would be better presented as a few research questions.

The method is appropriate, well described and the authors make great attempts to provide a robust and inclusive review (i.e. searching of grey literature). This is enhanced by conducting the review to the ENTREQ statement and critical appraisal. The search finished in October 2012, which makes the review now outdated. Could this be updated? Have many studies been published since to enhance this knowledge? There have been some qualitative studies published since this date (particularly in children), which might enhance the quality of evidence in the review (e.g. see BEACHES work, Adab Pallan).

The review is focused on studies that included people aged from 18 – 65 years, so a broad age population. While this provides a more inclusive approach, it would be interesting as a reader and for future interventions to understand how these barriers might be perceived differently on an individual level with age, gender, acculturation and migration years. I don’t feel currently that the review addresses this in detail and feel this would be vital for improving behaviours.

The review focuses on the barriers to physical activity. While it is important to overcome these barriers, it might have been useful to include studies that have considered facilitators of physical activity. Physical activity behaviours are complex and just removing a barrier might not be enough to increase activity behaviours. I feel the inclusion of facilitators may provide evidence of some of the components that work, which might support the removal of specific barriers and help for intervention planning. Currently, the paper reads as a fairly negative interpretation of physical activity patterns by just focusing on barriers. Secondly, it is unclear about the activity levels of the people included. Are these barriers for inactive populations or do the study samples engage in some activity? Barriers may be very different between these two populations. If this study focuses on lack of activity behaviour maybe the title of the study could reflect this by inclusion of the word ‘low’ for example.

While the authors acknowledge that the wealth of evidence is based on SA’s (10/14), I wonder whether the review would have been more focused if it just focused on SA groups. There appears to be some heterogeneity between ethnic groups and grouping them together seems to diminish some of this unique cultural variation. Even within Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi individuals, their experiences are likely to be different as is their risk of disease, their religious beliefs and cultural values.

Results: factors limiting access to facilities: You discuss the issues of paying for exercise in ethnic groups and that it is a wasteful low priority which might relate to exercise being free of charge in their country of origin. I wonder whether this is also a socio-economic issue, which may relate to some of Maslow’s hierarchy of basic needs. There are many studies that have shown SA’s are the most
deprived and socio-economically disadvantaged. Is it ethnic or a socio-economic issue therefore. For example, do White deprived parents report issues of cost and that it is a lower priority compared to feeding their children. Secondly, were all the people in the study born outside of the UK, as you refer to their country of origin? It might be useful to be explicit about this at the beginning of the results, especially considering that this may change with acculturation, years of migration, age 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 I have no competing interests