Reviewer's report

Title: Establishing oral health promoting behaviours in children - parents' views on barriers, facilitators and professional support: a qualitative study

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Reviewer: Anna-Lena Ostberg

Reviewer's report:

GENERAL COMMENTS
The paper deals with an interesting question, vital for dentistry. The authors have chosen a qualitative approach for exploring the views of parents, claiming that little is known in this specific research field. However, the analysis has no theoretical starting point and there is rather often a quantitative “thinking” in the presentation of results. The organization of findings is complicated. The themes and categories are often over-lapping which indicates that the analysis should be more elaborated.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS
Abstract The conclusion in the abstract is vague and contains only overall suggestions for the future. This must be more specific. Also, it does not correspond to the conclusion in the main text.

Introduction The introduction underpins the aim.

Methods The choice of homogenous focus groups should be motivated. Also, the choice of focus groups for data collection should be motivated as a whole (specifically interaction). One ethical question about the sampling: were the parents informed about the inclusion criteria, that is their children’s caries status?

The group interviews were held in a dental centre. Could this influence the participation, the results etc? Please motivate in the methods and reflect and discuss in the discussion section.

An assistant moderator “made sure that all participants contributed to the discussion”? How was this carried through? This is normally not the role of an observer (the same person took field notes that is, acted as an observer).

The storage of the data material is unclear; it is only said where it is NOT stored.

The method for analysis is said to be content analysis in the abstract and thematic analysis in the main text. This must be corrected. Also, there is no reference given for the data analysis, and this is also very meagre described. The model mentioned is not a model for qualitative analysis.

Did all authors read the transcripts equally carefully?
Results

The results section is a challenge for the reader, long and complicated. Firstly, it is desirable to guide the reader in a short “introduction” about the structure of the themes and main categories.

Two main themes are presented, one of them with two underlying subthemes with many categories. These two subthemes (the one about tooth brushing and the other about sugar consumption) are parallel with many categories in common. Moreover, many of the categories are overlapping, which should not be the case. To me, this part of the analysis does not seem to be completed. I understand that the authors want to separate “tooth-brushing” and “sugar consumption” to be able to tailor intervention programmes: “this and that should be considered when tooth-brushing is promoted” etc. But life is not as simple as that – certainly the parents’ attitudes/perceived influences and so on are about the same for the two research questions.

Moreover, in the presentation related to the figures, the factors described together are on different levels, the first example is in line 234: “social norms” is at a higher level than “parental perception” according to Figure 1. This goes on throughout the results.

The categories (or similar) mentioned in the figures, for instance “Value of healthy teeth & prevention” and “Locus of control” are very difficult to find in the text. This is also the same throughout the section.

Examples of quantitative “thinking”: lines 252, 253, 279, 334, 348 etcetera. Qualitative analysis is about discerning and identifying different ways of thinking about a phenomenon, not how common or frequent they are.

Line 320: I interpret that this heading relates to Figure 2, however it is not called the same there.

The second theme (Parental views on limitation and opportunities for professional oral health support) is given far less attention than the first theme. Why? Also, why are the subthemes and categories presented with a table here (and not a figure as for the first theme)? Moreover, in the table six factors are described, while only four are stated in the text.

And: which parents were cited – at least I hope that all focus groups are represented with citations. Some examples of the interaction in the groups should be given, too.

Discussion

In the first paragraph of the discussion (line 504) the authors write that the study findings are useful as a theoretical basis for interventions. Please explain the use of the word “theoretical” here.

Para 2 is partly repeating results.

Also here in the discussion, a quantitative thinking is shining through (para 3); please check and reflect. The last part of this paragraph should be provided with
references. This goes for lines 556-561, 569-572 and 573-580 as well.

Conclusion: please see under abstract.

Lastly, the core question: What is really new in the results?