Reviewer’s report

Title: Development of a consensus operational definition of child assent for research

Version: 0 Date: 17 Feb 2017

Reviewer: Rita Shackel

Reviewer’s report:

This article addresses an important issue which has received insufficient attention in the literature and by researchers generally. For this reason the article should be published as it will add to further discussion and reflection amongst researchers and ethics review boards about the nature of assent in research involving children/young people and how researchers should approach such assent in conduct of ethical research.

Whilst I think the article is publishable and as noted above addresses an important issue of discussion, there are several areas around which the article might be strengthened. Perhaps the authors would like to consider further discussion of these issues either in the current article or in future work:

(i) There is a need for more in depth discussion and reflection on the importance of presenting age appropriate information to child participants on the risks and benefits of the research so that they can properly be assessed by child participants as part of their decision as to whether or not they wish to participate in the research.

(ii) More detailed discussion of 16+ year olds is warranted and recognition of their maturity and autonomy approximating that of an adult. Of particular interest to this age group (but also more generally) is the question of how to manage potential conflicts between a young person who does not assent or is unsure about whether they wish to participate, and a parent that is strongly in favour of their child participating in the research. This issue is not addressed at all in the article.

(iii) The issue of privacy and confidentiality also needs closer consideration as a key component in the process of assenting children/young people. Often these issues are understood differently by children/young people and/or prioritised in different ways to parents/adults.

(iv) It would be useful also to further explore specific issues around assent of child participants in the context of very different types of research e.g. clinical v non-clinical, medical/health v social/educational etc.

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

Yes

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

Yes

**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.

I am able to assess the statistics

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

Acceptable

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