Reviewer’s report

Title: Psychosocial Support for Parents of Extremely Preterm Infants in Neonatal Intensive Care: A Qualitative Interview Study

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Reviewer: Anabela Araujo Pedrosa

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity of reviewing the article intituled "Psychological support for parents of extremely preterm infants in neonatal intensive care: a qualitative study". This is a very pertinent study, since the birth of a preterm baby is a major stressful event, facing the parents with very difficult challenges in terms of present and future adjustment. Increasing knowledge about difficulties felt and how to address it should be a priority in research in health settings, so I congratulate the authors for their choice and work.

The paper is clearly written and is interesting to read; the main objectives are also clearly stated and the abstract summarizes well what will follow in the text. References are balanced and up to date.

From the title and through the paper the authors aim to further clarify the "psychological support" needed by parents of extremely preterm infants cared for several weeks or months in a NICU, and following parents' answers they explore how these needs of support are met by different health professionals. It would be preferable to focus on or naming it "psychosocial needs" or preferably "psychosocial support" (for example, on the abstract and line 114) for parents of extremely preterm babies, since throughout the text there is reference not only to the psychological support - which should and must be given by psychologists, but also to other forms of instrumental and emotional support, which should mobilize all professionals working with parents in the NICU. This may seem a too rigorous view, but language is powerful and important - and we stand by the position of giving the due credit to specific interventions - such as psychological support - which of course does not undermine the importance of all forms of support given by a multidisciplinary team working with parents. We would advise the authors to change the terminology.

In the Background section, line 69, please considerer defining corrected age as gestational age minus the number of weeks born prematurely; the given definition is somewhat confusing.

The authors state the importance of family-centred care - which evidence shows should be the "golden standard" for caring in a NICU - and mention the impact of the experience of having a baby committed to such a unit in the process of bonding between parents and their child; given
the vast data concerning attachment processes and their pervasive impact in future development, the authors may consider reviewing the impact on attachment instead (or at least mentioning it, also).

In the Method section, authors mention the exclusion criteria, but it would be helpful to explain these further; why were parents of twins when one of the babies has died included in the study? Couldn't their needs be shaped by this major event? And why not include parents whose child had been referred to habilitative services - was there other reason than a possible ethical criterion? Parents in such hard situations probably have specific needs which may cause harm and even trauma when not met. Is this a future line of research the authors may want to pursue? We would like to see these options explained further in the Methodological considerations subsection.

When both the parents were interviewed, where the answers from mothers and fathers analysed separately? Were there differences between mothers' and fathers' psychosocial needs?

Was the infants' age at the time of the interviews chronological or corrected age (line 171)?

Line 176 - Please consider using "psychosocial support"; the same in line 195 - "psychosocial needs", line 204, 738 and others.

Line 191 - Wouldn't "were sorted into categories and subcategories" be more precise?

The Results section is very informative and clearly illustrates the categories and subcategories that researchers had chosen based on the content of the interviews; the vignettes/quotes were helpful and well chosen.

In the Discussion section, the authors achieve to make a good summary and discussion of the themes found; although it would probably make the paper too large, we would've liked to read more about how to address the needs reported by parents, or how to better fulfil it.

The paper would also gain in having "limitations of the study" and "future lines of research" subsections included in the discussion; there is mention of Methodological considerations, which are scarce.

Line 42 - Please review the sentence that starts with "How best…" - it's of course correct, but its meaning would be clearer if formulated in a way such as "It is worth exploring how best …".
Overall, this is an interesting and important paper, since it allows a better knowledge about the psychosocial needs of parents with an infant needing NICU care, and how to adress it in order to lessen stress and to promote adjustment.

**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?**
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Not relevant to this manuscript

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