Reviewer’s report

Title: Parents’ perceptions of reasons for excess weight loss in obese children: a peer researcher approach.

Version: 0 Date: 23 Jun 2017

Reviewer: Helen Jones

Reviewer’s report:

Summary:

This manuscript aims to explore parents' perceptions of how their child's excess weight loss was brought about, using trained peer-researchers. Thematically analysed interviews showed that parents felt that children should not be singled out as being overweight or obese and therefore whole family lifestyle changes should be made. Family changes which appeared to influence their child's lifestyle and weight loss were not triggered by feedback from NCMP measurements that indicated the child to be very overweight, but from more incidental factors.

Strengths:

This manuscript is well organised, with all components I would expect. The rationale is clearly demonstrated, with the reasons behind why this research is needed. The rationale for using peer-researchers is also clearly described. This collaborative piece of work has clearly considered the composition of the research team, bringing together those from a University setting, a public collaborator and a local authority public health team. The roles of all contributors, in addition to the peer-researchers, are described clearly from the initial planning of the project through to the analysis. A strength of this study was that the peer-researchers had been involved from the earliest point possible given the restraints of funding applications. In addition to undertaking interviews, peer-researchers were also involved in the development of the interview guide as well as the analysis.

Changes to the recruitment strategy in phase 2 of this study (interviews), due to insufficient participants, are clearly detailed and explained.

Strengths and weaknesses of the study are well considered with recognition of the small number of interviews conducted.

Ethical considerations are clearly described. Formal ethical approval is detailed and peer-researchers were also trained in understanding ethics, as well as being tested on important ethical issues after the three training workshops.

Overall, I really enjoyed reading this paper. It was generally well written, very clear and easy to follow. It highlights an important issue in childhood obesity. It takes a very interesting angle on
the development of childhood obesity, where typically the focus is on those that gain weight, not those that lose weight, between Reception and Year 6.

Minor changes/suggestions:

Interpretation in the conclusion of this article is not wholly supported by what was completed in the study. There is a lot of information supporting the use of peer-researchers in this study which is explained very clearly. However, the concluding part of the abstract states that peer-researchers 'resulted in a more comfortable interviewee experience' and the plain English summary states that 'the parent-interviewers created a relaxed and open interview experience' but there is no mention of how you came to this conclusion. The peer-interviewer training was evaluated but the interviewee experience of being interviewed by a peer-researcher is not detailed in this article. I have still classed this as a minor change as the main research question has still been answered: 'what reasons do parents ascribe for the reduction of excess weight in formerly obese children? Nonetheless, given the nature of the Journal, it would have been interesting to hear from those being interviewed, especially when the conclusion states more about the peer-research process than what parents have said. There is a slight disparity in my mind over the research questions, aims and conclusion. The only research question listed is: 'what reasons do parents ascribe for the reduction of excess weight in formerly obese children', however the conclusion and one of the aims of this study is related to the peer-research process. This is clearly a major part of this study yet the data is lacking (e.g. quotes) in the results from the peer-interviewer training debriefing interview and those who have experienced being interviewed by peer-researchers is not investigated.

Weaknesses of using peer-researchers could have been considered.

The article is very clear and well written in general. The exception to this is on P21 (lines 5-28) where I believe the article would benefit from a close editing. In the final two paragraphs of the discussion, the text is very disjointed and I found it very difficult to follow. This needs some formatting attention. In addition, I found lines 41-57 on P21 difficult to understand, perhaps due to the punctuation marks used.

The background section was very clear and concise. My only suggested change relates to lines 15-20: '…and currently between 11 and 13% of obese English children who are overweight in their Reception year go on to be a normal weight by Year 6.’ Either they were overweight or obese at reception or is the figure relating to the number of overweight and obese children? Should the word 'obese' be removed? I am interpreting it to say 'currently between 11 and 13% of English children who are overweight in their Reception year go on to be a normal weight by Year 6.’

I would have liked to have known what software, if any, was used to analyse transcripts initially by researchers. I would have also liked to see the messages/reflections generated from the peer-researchers to get a better understanding of how the initial cluster names developed into the finalised themes.
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