

A qualitative exploration of parent perceptions and involvement within school-based physical activity and health and wellbeing activities

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Objectives: Physical activity and health interventions involving both schools and parents have potential to be effective. However, little is known about the most effective methods to encourage parent involvement in such interventions. Therefore, this study was undertaken to obtain parent perceptions of current school-based physical activity and health practices, informing the design of future school-based interventions in Scotland involving parents.

Design: Parents (n=11) were recruited from two primary schools in Scotland, participating in a focus group (n=7), telephone interviews (n=2) and face-to-face interviews (n=2). Methods: An inductive Social Constructivist analytical approach was taken, which developed explanations and ideas surrounding parent involvement in health and wellbeing, rather than examining pre-conceived themes or hypotheses.

Results: Parents highlighted positive school-based health activities such as the variety of sports clubs provided whilst raising concerns including aspects of; playtime physical activity levels and walk-to-school initiatives. This study also highlighted barriers to parental involvement in school health and wellbeing activities, not previously seen in research, such as; health and safety issues, issues regarding the relationship between parents and schools, and social anxieties. Furthermore, recommendations to improve parental involvement in these activities included; improving parent-school communication, increasing parent-led activities and varying the timing of events.

Conclusions: The findings from this study indicate that altering school practices and improving parent-school communication could be effective ways to increase parent involvement in school-based health and physical activity interventions.