A qualitative study to explore the use of energy drinks by children and young people in England
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Background
Marketing of commercial energy drinks appears to target young people, although these drinks are generally not recommended for consumption by under 16s. Teachers in the UK have expressed growing concern about the effects on classroom behaviour, but little research has been conducted with school-age children. This study aimed to investigate children’s perceptions of energy drinks and what effects they are perceived to produce, in order to inform the development of tailored resources and interventions.
Methods
Eight focus groups have been conducted with pupils (n = 37) from primary and secondary schools in England, in addition to semi-structured interviews with school staff (n = 11). Interviews with parents are also underway. All data have been transcribed verbatim and analysed using the constant comparative approach. Preliminary analyses and intervention options will be discussed with stakeholders, including children and families, at an upcoming participatory workshop.

Findings
Emerging themes include the role of branding and marketing on young people’s choices, in addition to the influence of parents, siblings and peers. The data highlight similarities and differences between the children’s views and those of the adult participants, as well as gender and age differences amongst the children. There is heterogeneity in the motivations, perceived benefits and risks, and reported effects associated with energy drink consumption. Suggestions have been put forward by participants to address these issues, and subsequent discussions will consider how these might work, and for whom.

Conclusions
Although data collection is ongoing, a number of important issues have already begun to emerge. Given that this is the first in-depth UK-based study on this topic, we are confident that it will continue to generate findings of interest to diverse academic, practitioner and lay audiences.

Key messages
- Branding and marketing play an important role in young people’s consumption choices
- There are key differences between children’s views on energy drinks and those of adults, as well as gender and age differences amongst children