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# A mixed methods approach to advance the understanding of physical activity behaviour during pregnancy.

Marlize de Vivo & Hayley Mills

## Introduction

The benefits of physical activity during pregnancy extend to both mother and baby, however, before investing resources in interventions aimed at changing or indeed supporting pregnant women's physical activity behaviours, it is necessary to have a greater fundamental understanding of the modifiable factors influencing women's decisions during this time. The main purpose of this study was therefore to investigate the socio-cognitive determinants of physical activity during pregnancy.



## Results

Whilst results of the individual studies hold merit, meta-inferences point towards the development of three main themes:

1. Pregnant women lack access to the necessary information that would allow them to make informed decisions regarding their engagement in physical activities;
2. A co-ordinated effort involving interprofessional collaboration is required to support pregnant women in overcoming the barriers associated with regular physical activity participation; and
3. Profiling pregnant women according to motivation and behaviour status could serve as a useful and manageable starting point for intervening to produce positive changes in pregnant women's physical activity behaviour.

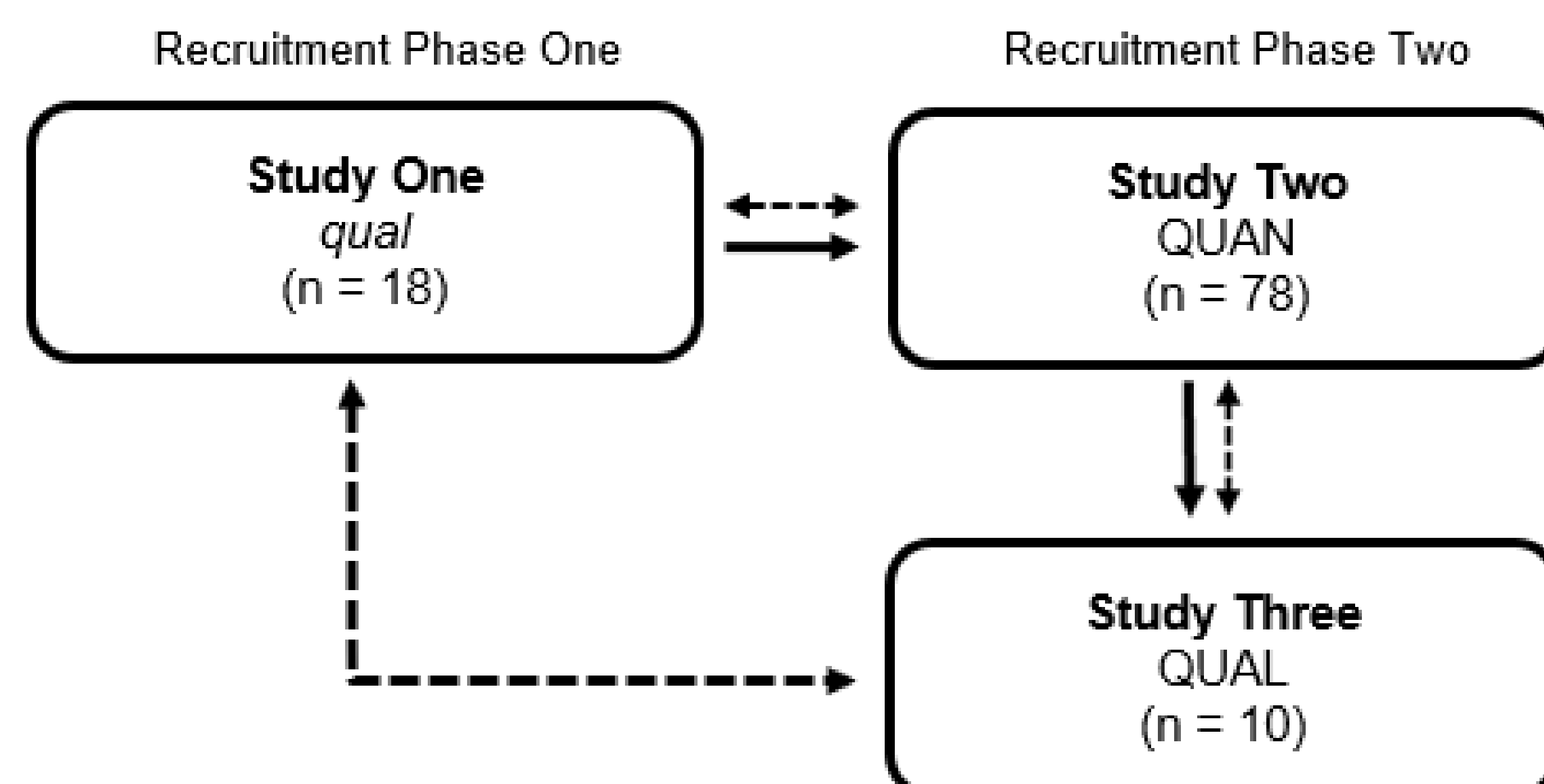


Figure 1: Schematic representation of the multiphase research design.

## Method

A mixed methods research approach using a multiphase design with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB; Ajzen, 1991) as conceptual framework guided the investigation. Participants were recruited from randomly selected antenatal clinics in the East Kent region of England.

Study One involved the elicitation of pregnant women's beliefs towards being physically active. Following content analysis, the modal salient behavioural, normative and control beliefs were used to inform the development of a TPB questionnaire which was implemented during the next phase of the investigation. Study Two examined the predictive utility of the TPB in explaining pregnant women's physical activity intentions and behaviour and scrutinised the role of past physical activity behaviour within this context. Finally, Study Three comprised semi-structured interviews involving community midwives that augmented the investigation.

Meta-inferences maintained the function of (a) improving the validity of the study, and (b) advancing the overall aim of the research project. Specifically, triangulation was used to ascertain convergence, corroboration, and correspondence of the findings between studies.



## Summary and Conclusion

In achieving better health and ensuring greater health outcomes for mothers and babies it is necessary to consider the modifiable factors involved in behaviour change, identify opportune moments to intervene, and involve both health and exercise professionals in facilitating and supporting pregnant women's engagement with physical activities.