Reviewer's report

Title: Children's and their teachers' perceptions of what is good and what is bad for eyes: a qualitative study in Pakistan

Version: 2 Date: 19 December 2005

Reviewer: Jens Aagaard-Hansen

Reviewer's report:

General
I have the following comments:

Form:

The title may be simplified, e.g. to something like: "Perceptions of eye health in Pakistan schools"
p.2: Key words may be changed to: Perceptions, eye health, Pakistan, schools, children, teachers.

Intervals missing typically before brackets, e.g. on page 3, 7 and 8.

p.3: Vitamin A deficiency abbreviated as VAD, but the abbreviation is not used subsequently.

p.5, line 12: shouldn't it be "three" additional questions?

p.6, lines 3 and 20: the hyphens between figures (e.g. 1-2 and 3-5) may mislead. Instead "Figures 1 and 2", subsequently "3, 4 and 5" would clarify. Also relevant for p.8.

p.8, line 11: probably "avoid" is needed before "holding".

p.8, percentages: it would be more consistent if there were the same number of decimals all over – either none or one (even if it is x.0%).

p.8, second last line: Table before figure to be consistent with previous sequence.

Content:

p.3, 4th para: it seems the authors takes an interest in teachers, not only as health educators, but also as first aid providers.

p.4, 1st para: There is a part on D&W technique which belongs to the Methods section. Instead a statement on what the article is all about would be nice.

p.4-5, bottom: "pre-tested questionnaires" – this is not clear. Are these the questions initiating the D&W exercise or a separate data collection tool?

p.4: the schools were purposively selected but how were the children selected? – purposively or what? Based on which criteria/sampling frame?

p.5, bottom: a bit disturbing that "all the data were analyzed using SPSS 10.0". A significant part of the data were qualitative and "wouldn't fit into SPSS". As it stands, it raises doubts to the authors
understanding of qualitative data. Should be clarified.

The study is using the D&W technique. This is fine and appropriate for the study (though not triangulated by other means). To strengthen this part, the authors may like to reflect on the limitations of this methods, e.g. by referring to Kathryn Backett-Milburn and Linda McKie: A critical appraisal of the draw and write technique, 1999, Health Education Research, vol. 14, no.3, pp.387-398.

The paper mentions that viral conjunctivitis is the most frequent ophtalmological ailment, but that also trachoma and VAD are very prevalent. Evidently, from a public health perspective, the two latter conditions are the important ones. However, in the paper (and not least in the discussion) trachoma is only mentioned in passing along with many other conditions and VAD not at all.

Conclusion:

The paper is well written – generally clear and consistent. It is refreshing to see a qualitative study on eye health and it is encouraging to see it coming from a part of the world from where such studies rarely reach an international audience. Hence, I am generally positive. Having said that, I am exploring ways to further improve (sharpen) the article. As it stands it is largely build on a presentation of data and a general recommendation that these perceptions should be taken into consideration when designing health education. This is obviously correct, but not very fascinating or innovative per se. At least outside ophthalmology this is not revolutionary. So my question is: could the article take one (or two) steps forward? For instance by suggesting what the hypothetical intervention could look like (towards the children and/or the teachers)? Could the paper reflect not only on the appropriate content of an intervention, but also the teaching methodology (old fashioned posters and "talk-and-chalk" teaching versus action-oriented learning), contextual constrains (lack of motivation and/or resources) or the "knowledge-practice gap" ??? Could a focus on the major eye health problems of trachoma and VAD help to sharpen the paper a bit (see above). These are just some ideas.

I assure you that the comments are meant in a constructive way. Good luck.
Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests