Reviewer's report

**Title:** The Problem of Adolescent Obesity in Hong Kong: A Cross-Sectional Observation Study

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 9 November 2007

**Reviewer:** Lawrence Dolan

**Reviewer's report:**

General

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

This paper is a well written manuscript that provides new information regarding the frequency of obesity in Chinese school children in Hong Kong. This information alone is important for clinicians and investigators. However, the paper has some deficiencies that need to be addressed.

1) The authors designed the selection process to provide a representative sample of the school children in Hong Kong. However, only 14 of 53 schools that were selected to participate agreed to enter the study. Do the authors have any information to support that the children in the participant schools are the same as those in the selected schools. The answer to the question either greatly strengthens or weakens the significance of the data.

2) The authors do not provide a distribution of the number of participants at each age. The number of participants at each age is a major contributor to the strength or weakness of the data and the conclusions.

3) The authors chose to evaluate the data using 4 different comparison populations – IOTF (a cross-sectional international standard), the CDC data (USA standard), the COTF standard (a Chinese standard), and the Hong Kong growth criteria (local standard). These standards allow a comparison to different reference groups. While these comparisons are interesting, the different and diverse control groups may not always have relevance to defining the frequency of obesity in the Hong Kong school children. One aspect of the comparison groups that the authors refer to but do not explore is the difference in the time interval for data collection. In the USA, most investigators agree that the epidemic of obesity began in the late 1980 and early 1990s. The differences in the time frame of data collection in the comparison groups allow the authors to explore whether obesity measures of the children in Hong Kong followed the same temporal pattern.

4) In the discussion on page 8, the authors state that due to changes in life, the Hong Kong growth study “may not be applicable to today’s young population. These discrepant findings also highlight the importance of periodically reviewing
national growth charts.” This reader interprets these statements as follows. The authors believe that obesity should be redefined based on the present state of adiposity. To this reader, this conclusion is a significant problem. Constantly redefining obesity based on contemporary measures will hide not identify a major medical issue.

5) The major problem with the paper is the overall tone of the manuscript. The authors made comparisons but fail to answer the most pressing issue. Why did they make the comparisons? The authors fail to answer the “so what” question. What do the authors really believe that their data shows? Why compare the data the authors collected to the each of the four reference groups? What do is the “take home” message to clinicians and investigators?

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests