Reviewer's report

**Title:** The population approach to falls injury prevention in older people: Findings of a two community trial

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 20 October 2009

**Reviewer:** Debra Rose

**Reviewer's report:**

The authors are to be complimented for undertaking a complex, population-based study in an effort to determine whether a low-intensity population-based intervention approach can be effective in reducing falls among older adults. While the study was conducted appropriately I was left with little understanding as to why the less-intensive intervention approach was unsuccessful as compared to the original study that resulted in a 22% lower incidence of falls in the original sample studied.

The results of the study were described but little attention was directed to interpreting the results in comparison to the previously successful SOYF program or providing any reasons for the non-significant findings. I would also have appreciated more detail in the Methods section as to how the less intensive program was implemented in the two sites given two different approaches were used (i.e., CBPR and "top-down"). While two clearly different approaches were used to implement the program at each site there was no indication of why this was so nor was any space devoted to a discussion as to why one approach might be better than the other for implementing this type of program. The Discussion largely centered around the call for a new approach to public health issues, which, while interesting to read, failed to enlighten me as to the potential future of the SOYF program as a population-based strategy aimed at preventing falls among older adults. Is there a future for this program based on the results obtained in this study? Is it that the success of the program requires a more intensive approach as was used in the original study conducted and currently supported in the literature? Finally, is it likely that adopting a more intensive and comprehensive approach will adversely affect the program’s cost-efficiency and/or effectiveness and thereby undermine its sustainability? These are the questions I would have liked to see addressed in the Discussion section in greater detail. One must also be prepared for the possibility that fall rates (but perhaps not injury rates) may increase as a result of older adults increasing their physical activity levels as was reported in the Results section.

While appreciating the complexities of conducting this population-based intervention I felt that too much was left unsaid that specifically related to the actual study outcomes relative to the previous study conducted and the different approaches used to implement the program in the two different communities. The only comparison of outcomes between the two communities was related to "awareness that falls are preventable" which was more positively impacted in the community that adopted the CBPR versus "top-down" approach (albeit
non-significantly). I would have liked to see a comparison between communities of other outcomes, particularly with respect to physical activity levels, which was identified as the second primary outcome of greatest interest to the authors. Overall, a disappointing read given the effort expended on conducting the study.

**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.