Reviewer's report

Title: Costs and effects of a 'healthy living' approach to community development aimed at reducing health inequalities in two deprived communities: findings from a mixed methods study

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Reviewer: Muhammad Kamrul Islam

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Major Compulsory Revisions

The author must respond to these before a decision on publication can be reached. For example, additional necessary experiments or controls, statistical mistakes, errors in interpretation.

This is a well-written paper. I offer my key thoughts as follows:

1. The title of the paper seems not compatible with the discussion in the paper. Particularly, the issue - 'reducing health inequalities' - is not explicitly (may be it is implicit) discussed in the manuscript although state in the title. I suggest, if the authors would like to have such expression in the title, more emphasis should be given (explicitly) how authors specify 'health inequalities' per se.

2. Further amplifications are needed for justification of doing the research. In particular, to understand the story- 'the intervention' need to be clarified further.

3. Clarification also be needed about the “effects of a ‘healthy living’ approach”. Particularly, on the indicators of the effects of implementation of the HLA.

4. ‘Before and after study design’ (as used in the study) may be endured with the ‘recall bias’ (a systematic bias which may occur when the way a survey respondent answers a question is affected not just by the correct answer, but also by the respondent’s memory) which would have been a significant threat to the validity of the study. To convince the readers on this concern, explanations would be warranted.

5. Small number of respondent with low response rate (year 1: 44% and in year 4 with new entry: 42%) and the high turnover of people in year 4 may cause two sorts of biases - selection bias and attrition bias. Selection bias is certainly a common and potentially serious problem, and qualitative study (similar to quantitative study) needs to recognize the consequences of selecting extreme cases of the outcome they wish to explain (see e.g. Collier & Mahoney, 1996). Attrition of the original sample represents a potential threat of bias as well, if those who drop out of the study are systematically different from those who remain in the study. This issue may be important as attrition can negatively affect the internal validity of the study.
6. Though the authors indicate some limitations of their study, the issues particularly, selection bias and recall bias should also be discussed. Another potential source of bias in qualitative research is the interviewer bias. Readers may be sceptic about the results and conclusions if the authors would not clarified how their work has not been endured with such biases. It may be important to discuss how such biases would be at least minimal for this study.

7. Page 10, para 1: as author noted “Volunteers (community members and others who freely gave their time) are acknowledged as a vital resource in the intervention. Their time was recorded but not valued in money terms as part of the costing exercise.”

However, it is widely accepted and recognized that any sort of time cost must be included in any costing or cost effectiveness analysis. Particularly, from the societal perspective all costs, such as the value of volunteer time should also include in any cost analysis (see e.g. Gold et al, 1996). In the 2003 Handbook on Non-Profits Institutions in the System of National Accounts the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs provides an overview of several methods for valuing volunteer time.

8. Overall, I think, it is not crystal clear that the results and conclusions of the study are adequately supported by the data.

Ref:


**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' below