Reviewer’s report

Title: Creating Healthy Environments: Focusing on the social environment in the evaluation of an Aboriginal health promotion program

Version: 1 Date: 1 March 2011

Reviewer: Lucie Levesque

Reviewer’s report:

The majority of the comments stemming from my review of this paper fall in the Major Compulsory Revisions category. Although the topic of health promotion in Indigenous communities is important, several theoretical, methodological, analytical, and interpretive shortcomings diminish the potential contribution of this paper. Detailed comments are provided below.

1. Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)

Abstract
-Background. Chronic disease prevention is mentioned here, but the paper’s background is focused on health promotion. Even though it is obvious that by promoting health, chronic diseases may be prevented, it is important to clearly define the “health outcome” of interest and use it consistently throughout the paper.

Background
-Consider moving the program description here from the methods section.

General
-Review use of ‘that’ versus ‘which’ throughout the paper

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

Title: The title of the paper is misleading since the social environment is not the main focus of the paper. Consider revising.

Background
-Sometimes the word Aboriginal is used to and other times the word Indigenous. It is recommended to use one term consistently throughout the paper.

-Rather than mentioning which ecological analysis method was used (i.e., Richard et al.) and the “store turnover method” it would be preferable to present the rationale for using these approaches in this section. More details about these tools could be provided in the methods section.
Methods
Setting
-Omit “The store turnover analysis concerns ...” from the description of the setting – this phrase belongs in the measures/analysis section.

Program development and activities
-Include a relevant citation after “participatory framework”

Store turnover
-The statement “For context, observed nutrient densities are reported beside “suggested dietary targets” ...” refers to the results table on page 9 and should be moved to the results section.

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

Abstract
-Conclusions: The sentence: ‘...success of such integration relies on the inclusion of Aboriginal culture ...’ does not flow from the results since the integration of Aboriginal culture and its impact were not assessed.

Background
-What is an Aboriginal model of health? A brief definition would be helpful given that readers may not be familiar with this model.

- Which determinants of health exactly are “unique to this population”? For which Indigenous health determinants is there ‘a gap in knowledge on how to evaluate the extent to which activities have addressed them”? It is difficult to gauge the relevance of using an ecological analysis without knowing what determinants are being addressed by the intervention program.

-Despite the emphasis of program activities on changing the food environment, no rationale is presented in the background to explain why the majority of program activities focus on eating.

This section should be revised and reshaped in a way that builds the study rationale.

-The study purpose is unclear. Is the goal to assess pre-post change in canteen offerings (the bulk of the paper reports on this)? Is the aim to assess the integration of ecological principles in the intervention program? Is the aim to determine how the program “was nested with the social environment of the community? If all of these aims are sought, then how do they fit together?

Methods
Setting
-A more detailed description of the setting would be helpful. Is the program set in one circumscribed community or does it involves several communities? Why are interventions occurring in these specific locations?

-Given that the focus is on the food environment, it would be useful to include: geographic information, type of food regularly available at the sports club, and description of the population that attends that club.

Population

-Who is the intended population of this intervention? What is the size and make-up of the intervention/study population? What percentage of the community accesses the services of the 3 key organisations? What are their demographics (SES, age, gender, etc)? This information would be useful to clarify and understand the context and relevance of the study.

Program

-How were program activities delineated from regular activities conducted by the 3 key organisations? What were inclusion/exclusion criteria for considering activities as belonging to the “program”? What is the rationale for so many nutrition activities relative to physical activity? Were there any other physical activity interventions or only the 10-week body challenge? How was program duration defined?

Store turnover analysis

-What is the store turnover analysis? What research question is this answering? A description of this analysis up front would be helpful to understand how this method works and what is being measured. Validity information should also be included and be supported by relevant citations.

- The authors make the case for evaluating programs that are culturally acceptable using methodologies that might reveal aspects of the program that are culturally relevant in order to make the programs more appropriate for Aboriginal communities. Given that, from a cultural perspective, people eat food and not nutrients, it seems that a more relevant analysis would focus on types of food, their meaning, and acceptability rather than on density and macronutrients.

Ecological analysis

-“HP” should be defined.

-The the illustrative example of ‘networking’ is wrong: a “self-help group relying on interaction between clients” (p.7) should be depicted as HP# [IND-IND]

Results

Store turnover

-Table 2 presents the “trends” in food groups and selected nutrients at the sports club; is this part of a statistical analysis and if so, what was that analysis? It is not appropriate to talk about trends with only two time points, at least three time
points are needed to be able to see a trend. Moreover, were there significant differences between 2005 and 2006? It is difficult to gauge program effects without this information.

-Table 3 presents the contribution to energy from macronutrients in 2005 and 2006. Again, if the purpose was to examine meaningful changes due to the program, a statistical test (e.g. t-test or ANCOVA if covariates are present) would be needed for examining significant differences over time and relate these to the intervention.

Ecological analysis
-Under Hungary for Victory (p.11), we are told that the “activity comprised four different activity (sic)” – how exactly was the unit of analysis determined? It is not clear how “activity” is being defined. Why are motivation and intention (e.g., foster team spirit) coded separately? Is it not the activity (i.e., program launch) that should be coded?
-Shouldn’t “foster team spirit” be coded HP# [IND-IND] rather than HP# INT?
-p.12: same coding mistake?: should the interaction between members of the Cummeragunja Women’s group be depicted HP# [IND-IND] rather than HP# INT?
-p.12: is the setting (i.e., “the host organization”) the same as the HP? Can it be both?
-Facilitators and barriers are presented in the results section yet there is no mention on the type of analysis that was used. How were the reported labels generated? How many barriers and facilitators were found? Which were most mentioned? Not enough details are provided to justify these findings.
-How do results from the store turnover method and the ecological analysis fit together? The added value of presenting these methods together is not addressed.

Discussion
-The study findings were not contrasted with those from similar studies. How do the present results fit with other program analyses using the Richard et al. tool?
-The limitations of the study should also be mentioned here. What were they?
- Discussion topics do not flow from the results: on p.15, the authors state that “an important enabler of the work arose from the participatory nature of the project by drawing on local Indigenous cultural expertise ...” – this did not come out in the findings from the present analyses.

Conclusion
-It is not appropriate to conclude that the program was effective for influencing the health environment of community members when only the food/nutrition environment was assessed (and not the health environment) and no statistical analyses were conducted. Nor is there any evidence presented in this paper to suggest that “the explicit inclusion of ecological principles in the planning of
future activities is likely to lead to greater integration... and improve the efficiency of programs.” Nor do the “data indicate that the success of such integration relies on the inclusion of culture ..”

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General comments

- Overall, the paper lacks focus in its aim(s), the study rationale is unclear, and it is difficult to see how the different methods complement each other or what role culture plays.