Reviewer’s report

Title: Developing Community-based Preventive Interventions in Hong Kong: A Description of the First Phase of the Family Project

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Reviewer: Larkin Strong

Reviewer's report:

In this manuscript, the authors describe the process for developing and implementing a family-based intervention to promote family health, happiness, and harmony in Hong Kong using a collaborative approach involving community partners. Articles such as this are becoming increasingly important as interest in community-academic collaborations has grown yet few studies describe the processes, challenges, and lessons learned associated with such projects, particularly those involving non-Western cultures and populations. While this manuscript has the potential to make an important contribution in this way, the manuscript would greatly benefit from a clear purpose statement, a reorganization of the structure of the paper, and additional detail regarding community involvement, aspects of the planning process, and intervention design. In addition, the authors should highlight the relevance of this work to public health. Although this reviewer is suggesting that the authors add to the manuscript, thereby extending its current length, thorough editing will help make the manuscript more concise.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Clearly stated purpose statement. The purpose or objective of the manuscript as currently written is not clear. The only reference to the focus of the paper is provided on page 4, first paragraph: “This paper focuses only on the intervention component’s development, and reports on the first phase that lasted approximately two years following initiation.” As such, readers are not informed as to what they may hope to glean from this manuscript. Upon reading the manuscript, the reader may infer that the purpose is to describe the process through which the intervention was developed and associated lessons learned and challenges, but the authors should provide a clear statement of purpose as well as a roadmap so that readers may be aware of the type of information and results to be presented.

2. Reorganization. The manuscript does not follow the journal’s guidelines for section headings, which should include Background, Methods, Results and Discussion (combined or separate), and Conclusions. Although the manuscript is not a traditional research paper in the sense that it focuses more on the process of developing and implementing an intervention rather than on the outcomes or the presentation of data, it would nonetheless benefit from reorganization. The manuscript currently begins by describing the initiative prior to presenting the issues and problems to be addressed. Thus, the rationale and need for the
intervention remain unclear until later in the manuscript. The following suggestions are provided to aid in the organization of the manuscript:

a. Background section – Describe the issue at hand and why there is a need for the family intervention very early in this section. Data to support the prevalence or increase in the problem/issue (i.e. break-down in family interrelationships) are more convincing than descriptions of mass media reporting. This section should also include a brief description of the initiative and the collaborative approach used, including descriptions of the research team and community partners, including their respective roles.

b. Methods – Describe the planning process, including the various strategies to assess sources of parent-child stress, the findings, other sources of input, and considerations

c. Results

i. Intervention design and assessment

1. Because there were 5 separate pilot studies conducted, a table briefly describing each study (e.g. target behaviors, intervention approaches, the comparison program, outcomes, and transition points targeted) would be helpful

ii. Challenges and lessons learned

d. Conclusions – What are the key take-home messages of this research? These should be highlighted here.

3. Greater elaboration of community involvement in the development and implementation of the intervention. Given that an important focus of this manuscript is the development of an intervention from “within” a culture, the readers would benefit from additional information describing the structure of the collaboration and the contributions made by the respective partners. How were the community partners selected or invited to participate in this research? Did the collaboration involve using or building off of longstanding relationships? What were the roles of community partners in this study? Additional information regarding the types of community partners involved would be informative. The authors describe social service agency partners. What sectors were represented? Were they only community-based organizations or were healthcare providers also represented?

4. Greater elaboration on the strategies used to investigate sources of parent-child stress (pages 10-11). Given that the qualitative approaches (b and c) were used to inform the development of the intervention, further information should be provided regarding the selection of participants, the total number interviewed, the topics discussed, and an explicit statement of the themes (b only). For c in particular, did group participants represent a community-based sample? Clinic based? School-based? How were participants grouped by the age of their child (e.g. provide ages or age categories)?

Minor Essential Revisions

5. There are two areas where previous work is referred to but not cited. Please
add citations to the following:

a. Page 5, second paragraph – “The importance of developing interventions from ‘within’ a culture has been recognized as important [cite], but…”

b. The difficulties of dissemination evidence-based interventions have been recognized [cite], and the CBPR approach has been lauded[cite], but …”

6. Page 8, first paragraph – The first paragraph is confusing. Were the two guiding premises used to guide the planning process for the intervention, or did they emerge as a result of the planning process? Also, please elaborate on the term “lifespace.”

7. Page 13, second paragraph – The authors state that they used the Health Action Process Approach model to guide the design of the intervention. It would be helpful if the authors could provide a brief overview of the constructs involved in this model in this paragraph.

8. Page 14, first paragraph under Recruitment – Please provide additional information regarding how participants were recruited through schools. For example, how were schools selected? How was recruitment information shared with parents? How many schools and participants agreed to participate?

9. Page 15 – Who were the interventionists? Were they university staff, recruited from the community, trained? What was their educational/training background?

10. Page 22, last paragraph—The authors state that the trials were sustainable and cost-effective. Sustainability typically refers to the continued ability to implement the program beyond the period of research funding. What evidence presented indicates they were sustainable in this way? Or, if the authors are using a different definition of being sustainable, please clarify. Also, how were the interventions determined to be cost-effective when cost data were not presented in this manuscript? If this is based on work presented in another paper or unpublished, this should be indicated.

11. Because the journal is focused on public health, elaborate on the relevance of this work to the field of public health

Discretionary Revisions

12. Page 7 – The first sentence of the second paragraph on this page refers to “rapid social, political, and economic changes” in Hong Kong. While the social and economic conditions are clearly described, it is not apparent what political changes the authors are referring to. Also on this page, the authors are encouraged to remove the repeated use of the phrase, “As a result…” It is not clear from the information presented that these are direct causal relationships or rather concomitant trends.

13. Page 13, bottom paragraph – the authors refer to “risk factors such as harsh parenting,” but they do not specify what harsh parenting is a risk factor for.

14. Page 13, last line – it is not clear why “Cunningham and his group” are referred to by name here.

15. Throughout the paper the authors enclose certain terms in quotes, e.g. “expert,” “ring true,” “positive discipline.” Rather than leaving readers to wonder
what exactly the authors are trying to convey with the use of the quotations, it would be more helpful to simply state the intended meaning without the use of quotations.

**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