Reviewer's report

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

Version: 4 Date: 19 October 2011

Reviewer: Larkin Strong

Reviewer's report:

The authors put considerable work into revising the manuscript and it is certainly much improved. However, important issues remain.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The relevance to public health remains insufficient. Although the authors state that “the quality of the parent-child relationship has emerged as a key risk factor for problems with physical and mental health in adults,” this is a very broad statement that doesn’t illustrate how parent-child relationships influence health. What are the mechanisms? Stress? Further, discussion of a conceptual framework (e.g. Figure 1) that describes how parent-child relationships are related to health and how modifying these relationships can lead to improved health, happiness, and harmony is needed, since those are the ultimate outcomes of interest. Otherwise, the basis for the interventions and the targeted behaviors is unclear.

2. The problem described in paragraph 2 of the introduction refers to political, economic, and social changes that have placed stress on the family. These changes pertain more to the context rather than the issues that are addressed by the study/interventions. The interventions described in this manuscript address parent/child relationships and are focused on parental actions/behaviors toward their children. Thus the problems addressed are family relationships that may or may not be associated with the political and social changes.

3. One would imagine that with the intervention design involving participants generating their own action strategies to follow that there would be considerable heterogeneity across the different groups of participants in terms of the behavior changes pursued. Was this discussed/considered by the research team and how is this dealt with in the assessment?

4. Discussion – The discussion seems lacking. A summary preceding the lessons learned regarding the benefits and challenges of designing locally relevant intervention and of academic –community partnerships (as stated in the Background) would help. Then, the lessons learned can go into more detail regarding specific issues that were particularly important and warrant further emphasis.

5. This is a long manuscript with a lot of detail that would benefit from further editing to make it more concise and improve readability. You don’t want readers
to get lost in the detail.

Minor Essential Revisions

6. The life cycle figure shows times of transitions, which the authors suggest are times of vulnerability and opportunity and thus represent appropriate times for interventions. However, the interventions focus on parent-child relationships during the school-age years. Thus, only one or two of the time points shown in the cycle are targeted (school, teenage years) making the relevance of this figure and the delineation of different generations unclear.

7. Measurement paragraph– What were the behaviors “that were targeted in the intervention programs”?

8. Harmony seems like a difficult construct to measure. The authors describe developing their own scale but don't indicate the items used to measure it. Further, they provide evidence of reliability but not validity.

9. Page 6, first paragraph – “a cohort study to determine risk factors and causes of these problems” – what are the problems? What are the “identified changes”?

10. It is still not clear who the target community and families are for these interventions. All families in Hong Kong who met eligibility criteria?

11. On page 22 the authors state that they “began by surveying members of the targeted sample to develop items to assess change.” First, who is the targeted sample? Second, these sessions that were taped and transcribed, were they part of the qualitative community need discussion groups?

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