Reviewer's report

Title: Parental food-related behaviors and family mealtime frequency: associations in Norwegian dyads of parents and preadolescent children

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Reviewer: Mette Rasmussen

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Parental food-related behaviors and family mealtime frequency: associations in Norwegian dyads of parents and preadolescent children.

General comments:

This manuscript focus on an interesting and relevant topic that is still studied only to limited extends. The manuscript is generally well written, but suffers from a number of major limitations especially related to abstract, methods/analyses and discussion. Please find my detailed comments below.

Major compulsory revisions:

Abstract:

The abstract needs a better balance. Too much focus is placed on the background section not leaving room for more detailed information on methods and results. The use of the CFPQ for measuring feeding practices should be mentioned in the methods section. In the result section, the most important estimates of association should be reported. In the conclusion, the wording appears misleading. It says ‘Our results indicate that especially the home environment may serve as a positive influential factor regarding the frequency of family meals’. This indicates that especially home environment is an important factor among all potential factors influencing meal frequencies. It should be clear that home environment is especially important when specifically considering feeding practices. Also it should shortly be stated what is meant by home environment.

Introduction:

As a reader of the introduction, one would like to know in more details what is meant by feeding practices. A clear understanding of what this involves does not come until the specific measures are presented in the methods section. The introduction would benefit from more focus on the definition of feeding practices. Thereby, it gets clearer what this study is about when reading the research questions.

The third research question should be deleted. First, it is overlapping with research question 1 and second, it indicates some extend of causality which cannot be studied in the applied cross-sectional data. Also, the direction of the associations between feeding practices and family meal frequencies may not be
straight forward. As indicated in the discussion the two concepts may be outcomes of a common latent variable – e.g. a general high value and positive attitude towards healthy living within the family. Therefore, the directions of the associations cannot be anticipated and indicated. Else, the structure of the introduction is sound.

Methods:
What is meant by ‘dinner’? Supper is an evening meal and breakfast is a morning meal. If a mid-day meal is what is meant by using the term ‘dinner’, I suggest replacing it with ‘lunch’. Please specify.

Statistical analyses:
It is a major limitation of the study that no confounders are included in the analytical model and analyses. Several important confounders may exist of relevance for the association between feeding practices and meal frequencies - including family structure and parental socioeconomic background.

Also, the applied data are collected by cluster sampling introducing a potential risk of dependent data. Therefore, the regression model should be run as a multilevel model thereby accounting for the potential design effect introduced by the cluster sampling.

It should be stated that a linear model (regression) is applied. As stated above, potential confounders should be included in the analytical model.

Discussion
Several important elements are lacking in the discussion. These involve a critical discussion of non-respondents – both at school level and at student level. Almost every third school declined to participate and around half of all students enrolled at the participating schools did not respond. The potential consequences for the results and conclusions drawn on the presented analyses should be discussed. Also a discussion of residual confounding should be included. When including potential confounders available in the dataset a discussion of potential additional but not available confounders should still be included.

The validity of the applied measures should generally be reported (in the methods section). One strength of the study that is highlighted in the discussion it the use of two different sources. An assumption for this approach to be a strength is that the applied measures are valid – if students are not able to report frequency of family meals, it is not a strength of the study to collect such data from the students. Therefore, information on the validity of the applied measure on frequency of family meals collected among students should be reported. I am aware that not many validation studies exist on students’ reports of meal habits, but any experiences gained from the present study – e.g. quantitative and/or qualitative results from pilot studies/the pre-tests – should be reported.

Conclusion
The purpose of a conclusion is to specifically relate to the research questions
posted at the beginning of the manuscript. In the present manuscript, conclusions are only drawn for the first and third research question. Conclusions on the second research question are not included. Please revise.

Minor essential revisions:

1. In the introduction varying terms are used for family meal – family meal frequency and family mealtime frequency. Please be consistent.

2. Page 3/last sentence of the first paragraph: ‘…..mealtime frequency has been associated with increased discussion and knowledge….’ Please be a bit more specific about what is meant by discussion and knowledge. Discussion within the family? At the table? And parent or child knowledge about nutrition?

3. Page 3/second (and last) paragraph: here the term ‘home environment’ is used for the first time. However, here it is not the same concept as ‘home environment’ used to define a specific aspect of feeding practices. This is confusing for the reader. Please revise.

4. Page 9/second paragraph: the midsection (starting with: These time constrains….) of this paragraph is difficult to follow – please revise.

5. Page 9/second paragraph: the term ‘within-meal carry-over habits’ needs some explanation.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

No competing interests