Reviewer’s report

Title: Trading between healthy food, alcohol and physical activity behaviours

Version: 2 Date: 1 October 2014

Reviewer: Carolin Donath

Reviewer’s report:

Review of the manuscript:
Trading between healthy food alcohol and physical activity behaviours

Dear Authors,

Thank you for investing time in research concerning healthy and risky behaviors in young adulthood; especially for the broader view including not only one health-relevant behavior. Following please find my comments / questions concerning your manuscript.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Background, 2nd. Paragraph: Could you please illustrate with definite numbers how many young adults fulfill / not fulfill the recommendations? Please give a reference for the statement that “few meet these recommendations”. By the way, this is not only a problem of young adults in England. A study of Keller and colleagues (2007 and 2008) shows results that go in the same direction:


(Later on, in the text you give estimates for physical activity and alcohol consumption, but not about dietary intake. I was expecting the numbers earlier. So possibly change the position of this important information and complement.)

2. Background, 3rd. paragraph: What guideline concerning alcohol intake do you refer to? Specify the amount of alcohol intake that is seen as not harmful in this specific guideline. Alternatively see/cite for example WHO.

Furthermore, since you refer to Binge Drinking in the results section, report the prevalence of Binge Drinking in the UK in addition to the 20 % you mentioned that do not adhere to the guideline.

3. Background, 4th. Paragraph: Please specify the existing literature. Is there “little or no”? This is contradictory. Please refer to studies that at least touch the theme. Thus, the reader can better put your research into the frame of existing work.
From the medical point of view, it is hard to imagine that there is no research on the interplay between diet, alcohol intake, and physical activity since for example this is an important question in diabetes research.

4. Background general: Give in one or two sentences for each health behavior the recommended optimum: for example xxx minutes physical activity / x times a week, etc. Since there are guidelines which you refer to, it is a service to the reader to name the facts condensed in the manuscript.

5. Methods, 2nd paragraph: You have a convenience sample of 50 adults. This is fine for the research questions you posed and the methods you applied. But: This is a very different sampling strategy and sample size than you would have in epidemiological studies. Thus, there is absolutely no reason to compare the percentages of certain age groups in your sample with the population. Please omit this sentence. No reader should get the idea to generalize the results to the whole UK population. This is not justified.

6. Methods, 2nd paragraph: The characteristics of your sample should be given here, not in the results section.

7. Methods and Aims: Could you make clearer (in the Method section), what parts or what questions in the interview guide were used to answer which of the three research questions?

8. Results, first paragraph: see comment 5

9. Results, first paragraph: The last sentence is already an interpretation and discussion of the results you found. Please integrate this in the discussion, possibly in a section where you reflect on the sample and the generalizability of the results.

10. Results section: This needs urgently to be structured more. Where are the answers to your first research question? I can see a heading for question 2 and for question 3.

11. Results: I would expect in the results section a description of the three health relevant behaviors (diet, activity, alcohol consumption) in the sample. How prevalent are they, how many fulfill the recommendations? Only referring to other publications is not enough. Please give a least an overview preferable as a table.

12. Results section, last sentence: This statement says all and nothing. “…, lifestyles were diverse, with variations in …” – I have read the results section, but I have no idea how the lifestyles were. This repeats a little my comment no. 11, but to really learn something from this study and understand the trade-offs and their consequences – we need to know the basics. Just as an example question: How many young adults in your sample did engage in Binge Drinking the last 4 weeks prior to your interview?

13. Discussion, first paragraph: From the perspective of addiction research
cannot accept that we say, because of reluctance to change drinking behavior, we should not even try behavioral interventions. Respecting the theory of Motivational Interviewing and also the TTM-Model (Stages of Change; Prochaska & DiClemente) the interventions just have to be differently designed. A goal cannot be change of behavior; the goal has to be raising the motivation to change behavior. Furthermore prevention initiatives tailored at this age group do not have abstinence as a goal but controlled consumption (See for example BZgA in Germany – “Know your limit”-campaign). Please consider.

14. Discussion: a section discussing the limitations of the study is missing; parts of it are at the beginning of the conclusion. Please relocate into the discussion section and complement.

15. Conclusion, 2nd. Paragraph (line 503): This conclusion is not justified. You do not report on how many adults would change their alcohol intake or how likely they are willing to do that. This is not included in the results section and thus cannot be concluded from the paper as it is.

16. Conclusion in general: Your conclusion is just a continuation of the discussion right now. There should for example be no references in the conclusion. Please formulate a clear, short and new conclusion paragraph where you condense the lessons you (and the reader) learned from your study.

Minor Essential Revisions

1. I would suggest shortening the number of references cited in paragraph 2 of the background section. There, you cite 13 sources right now [“9 –21”].

2. Conclusion: Reference “21” is not very concise for citing/referring to the consequences of binge drinking. There are new studies on the consequences concerning the brain structures and function from the Susan Tapert working group and there are reviews concerning the more general health and social consequences. Please incorporate those more precise references.

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.