Author's response to reviews

Title: Socio-economic patterns of overweight, obesity but not thinness persist from childhood to adolescence in a 6-year longitudinal cohort of Australian schoolchildren from 2007 to 2012

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Author's response to reviews:

Dear Editor,

Thank you very much to the reviewers who provided such detailed and useful feedback.

We have made all of the suggested changes by changing the aim in the Abstract and deleting all of the paragraphs identified by the reviewers.

Please see a point by point response to each of the reviewers as outlined below.

Response to Reviewer 1

Both reviewers pointed out that this research design cannot be used to show trends in prevalence, since cohort studies confound age-related and secular trends. However, the paper still shows evidence of this original aim.

For example,
on pp9-10, the sentence beginning "Thus it appears..." still refers to prevalence trends.

Response – Sentence deleted as requested.

The first line of the abstract focuses on this issue as well. I encourage the authors to read very carefully through their paper, to be sure the focus is crisply
on the issue of the relationship between SES and weight status and how it changes, or doesn't, with age. They should delete any mention, except in the background, of trends in prevalence, which this study cannot adequately address.

Response – Sentence deleted in Abstract as requested.

Response to Reviewer 2

The following paragraph in the discussion should therefore be deleted: "The study found no longitudinal changes in overweight and obesity prevalence over the six year period, suggesting a plateau, which has been reported recently in a number of Australian studies [18, 20, 30, 36, 37] and in a range of international studies [14-18, 38-40]."

Response – Sentence deleted as requested.

Thus, it appears that in regional NSW, as in many other regions of the Westernized world, childhood overweight and obesity does not appear to be increasing, but is rather showing stabilizing trends."

Response – Sentence deleted as requested.

I also recommend deleting the following paragraph: "In light of the current findings, we recommend that researchers, health educators, health professionals, community staff and school personnel be encouraged by the plateau in overweight and obesity prevalence rates and consider new studies examining what factors may have contributed to the increases seen in the 1980s to the 1990s and what contributed to the plateau since the late 1990s."

- I would delete the following paragraph - the study does not investigate the likely impact of prioritization of health promotion resources: "Although childhood and adolescent obesity have been recognised as a major public health concern in
many countries for many years, and recent studies highlight the consistently higher prevalence among those from low SES backgrounds, the results of the current literature suggest that public health campaigns and interventions aimed at promoting healthy eating and increased physical activity should focus on those in most need [18, 20]."

Response – Paragraphs deleted as requested.

- An alternative to the use of the word "handicapped" is suggested - please see http://www.miusa.org/ncde/tools/respect.

Response – Word “handicapped” deleted and replaced with “disabled” as requested.

- I would delete the following paragraph which is not related to the findings of the study: "Additionally, for those youth who reside in socially and economically disadvantaged, ethnically diverse communities and attend low SES schools, prevention and intervention programs should be designed, implemented and evaluated. Such interventions appear to be necessary on a social disadvantage platform and should be developed in collaboration with community members and youth in order to avoid unintended stigma, criticism of cultural body ideals and norms and other potentially harmful outcomes. "

Response – Paragraph deleted as requested.

- Given the new direction of the paper, I would change the abstract from "Recent studies have reported a plateau in childhood and adolescent obesity prevalence worldwide, but in many Westernized countries they are still considered to be high for socially and economically disadvantaged communities" to "The prevalence of obesity is higher in socially and economically disadvantaged communities in most Westernized countries."

Response – Sentence deleted and changed to new wording in Abstract as requested.