Reviewer’s report

Title: Promoting Healthy Eating and Physical Activity among School Children: Findings from Health-E-PALS, the first pilot intervention from Lebanon

Version: 2
Date: 18 April 2014

Reviewer: MAGDALENA C CUENCA GARCIA

Reviewer’s report:

This study addresses an interesting intervention program promoting healthy eating and physical activity among school children aged 9-11 years in Lebanon. The aim was to evaluate the feasibility and effectiveness of a multicomponent school-based intervention to promote healthy eating and physical activity (and prevent obesity) with school children. The paper is well written, and the methods and analyses are correct but need to be clarified. I miss some extra information in some sections of the paper, for example: statistical section including clear and full information, more detail about physical activity or sedentary screen time measure, etc.

Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

The main comment is if school have been considered as a random confounder, although the selection is consistent and justified, and there is balance between public and private schools. It could be that the differences are due to differences between centres, mainly by the SES and environment in which they lived.

The article is of interest, but few major and minor revisions should be addressed before considering it for publication. Please see comments below:

Introduction
Page 3 line 25. Could you clarify the aims? For my, there are clearer in the abstract.

Method section
Page 5 line 78. Please, Could you explain why you are promoting moderate physical activity instead of both moderate-to-vigorous physical activities? The physical activity intensity is a very import issuer in body composition changes.
Page 5 line 85. What mean ‘C.H.M’?

Page 5 line 95. ‘Anthropometric measurements including height, weight, and waist circumference were carried out at both time points using standardized techniques and calibrated equipment’. Please, to include make and model of the used materials.

Page 6 line 99. Please, to be consistent, could you include the number of questions in nutrition knowledge and self-efficacy questionnaires?

Page 6, line 102. I miss information about PA questionnaire and screen time habits. More detail is need. Idem, for diet. Did authors assess the time spend in PA and screen time? I so, it should be show.

Page 6, 105. For knowledge score range: the higher the score mean the better the knowledge about diet. Please, add it.

Page 6, lines 110-114. This paragraph needs to be move to ‘Statistical section’. Statistical section need to content full information about, data, sex interaction quantitative and qualitative statistical test used and the software used (as authors did). In addition, normal distribution of the main continuous variables should be shown.

Page 6, line 123. Please, explain this sentence: ‘…analysed using thematic content analysis’

Statistical section
See comment aforementioned. This section should be described in detail to easy read.

Please, describe the test used in tables 3 and 4. Did authors use binary logistic binary regression? Please, clarify. In addition, the reference group (table 3 and 4) should be comment in this section and mentioned into the tables.

Result section
This section should be completed.

Page 7 line 137. Delete: ‘As can be seen’

Page 7 line 137-139. ‘students 137 belonging to both groups (intervention or control) were very similar (for the most part) in 138 their baseline behaviours and habits, while marked differences were observed at post-test’. Please, add P value and statistical test used to check these differences. Include statistical test used in table 2.

Page 7 line 142. Add ‘(Table 3)’ before to ‘controlling for the student’s baseline responses’. And then, delete ‘As shown in Table 3,’.

Page 7 line 145: ‘this could partially be explained by the lower proportion of children 145 in the control group reporting daily breakfast intake at post-test’. Results are not discussed in result section. Move this sentence to discussion section.

Page 7 line 148: ‘The intervention was also successful at reducing the odds of
having chips as snacks and the odds of drinking soft drinks (Table 3). Please, add statistical data or the effect size.

Page 7 line 151: 'Purchasing habits were also compared and results showed that the odds of buying chips, soft drinks and chocolate were much less for an average student in the intervention versus control group, controlling for their baseline habits (Table 3). Please, add statistical data (odds, P value,...) or the effect size.

Page 7 line 163: Unknown symbol in this sentence.

Page 7 line 174: Please, add more information, at least, the means and SD data. What about waist circumference?

Page 10 line 256. 'Efforts to decrease availability of energy dense snacks and drinks were only successful in few schools; as shop owners were concerned about reduced profit'. This point should be considered, some differences could be due to this change, so if children's do not have unhealthy food they can eat and then dereferences are due to changes in the environments and not because children want to eat better.

Discussion
Page 8 line 196: Could author explain how studied feasibility of undertaking a successful school-based intervention?

Page 9 line 210. Add a ',' after 'In addition'

Page 10 line 256. 'Efforts to decrease availability of energy dense snacks and drinks were only successful in few schools; as shop owners were concerned about reduced profit'. When will this initiative take? If it was made during the intervention, the results are influenced and are not valid. Could you detail?, please.

Page 10 line 289. Authors did not assess the screen time, only whether or not watching TV. It is an imprecise measure, in my opinion, and it should shown screen time, if this has been measured. Is difficult to avoid this habit totally... just decrease the time is already very beneficial.

Page 10 line 289. 'Despite the strict rules at home for screen time during school days in some families'. Please, explain how it has been evaluated.

Page 12. Conclusion should be summary in one paragraph instead of in one page. The conclusion in start in line 340

Minor Essential Revisions

Tables

Table 1. Please, check the form letter.

Table 2. It should be good to include knowledge and self-efficacy scores

Table 3 and 4. P value column could be deleted. Please, clarify the reference group too. Both tables could be shown in figure to easier understanding.

Add more details about food questionnaire and food group in the method section.
Bibliography
Please, check the format of the bibliography

**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:**
I declare that I have no competing interests