Author's response to reviews

Title: Secular changes in height, weight and body mass index in Hong Kong Children

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Reviewer: Timothy A Welborn

1. In the Introduction and Discussion, the use of the Hong Kong Student Health Service criteria for obesity (> 120% of the median weight for height) is cited. Reservation about this (unsatisfactory) parameter should be expressed, together with acknowledgement that the use of BMI is currently the accepted WHO standard.

Response: Yes we agree. Use of the criteria > 120% of the median weight-for-height by the Student Health Service is historical. We have now included a sentence to explain this and emphasise that BMI is the accepted WHO standard.

2. In Methods. More details are required about the accuracy of the scales, any quality control measures used, for example the use of standard weights to validate the telephone output.

Response: More details calibration of scales and methods of quality control have been added. Not clear what reviewer means by telephone output.

3. In Methods. How was “random selection” of the schools achieved – by a card system, or use of random numbers, or another method? “Arbitrary” selection may be the more appropriate phrase.

Response: Schools were selected based on a computer generated random number. This information has been added.

Reviewer: Han C Kemper

1. the purpose of this study is to compare height, weight and BMI from three big samples of children in Hong Kong measured 30 (1963) and 12 (1993) years apart. The cross sectional design is ideal to answer the research question about secular trends. This is not clear formulated in abstract (background) and in the paragraph background. Not clear in the abstract, background and methods is that secular changes were made in three populations. It became clear in the tables 1, 2, and 3.

Response: Yes we agree that this was not clear and this has now been clarified in the abstract, background and methods.

2. Methods are well described and also the way percentile curves are calculated. They have to include a paragraph about the way the same methods of weight, height and BMI are used in the three years (1963, 1993 and 2005/6.

Response: Further details of methodology of the 1963 study have now been added.

3. The collected data are sound and well controlled by trained staff

4. Results are relevant and clear. Authors have to explain why they not used the 1963 data for comparison of overweight (table 3) and also not in the figures.

Response: The detailed raw data for the 1963 study was not available. Detailed summary data enabled tables 1, 2 and 3 to be completed. We have now also used this data to estimate the 85th and 95th BMI centiles and added this to Table 5. However it was not possible to make estimates of the percentage of overweight and obese children in 1963 (Table 4).

5. Discussion and conclusions are well balanced

6. Limitations are stated in the paper

7. Publications cited are relevant

8. Abstract (see above) is not clear and does not inform about 1963 comparison

Response: Agree. This has been clarified in the abstract (see above).

9. Writing is sometimes too abundant but acceptable the suggestions for revision are major and compulsory.