Reviewer's report

Title: Participant Recruitment and Retention in a Pilot Program to Prevent Weight Gain in Low-Income Overweight and Obese Mothers

Version: 2 Date: 18 May 2009

Reviewer: Kylie Hesketh

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Major Essential Revisions

Abstract: conclusion could be tempered eg. “may be important considerations”. Not really appropriate to make such a strong conclusion based on evidence from a single pilot study. May be more useful to summarise the findings here: eg. psychological factors such as depression and stress appear to be important considerations… However behavioural factors, BMI and race did not impact….

Results

As this paper reports on recruitment and retention, recruitment (response rate) figures should also be reported.

Qualitative data – recruitment feedback is reported from participants only, retention suggestions are provided from WIC staff only. Were participants asked about retention strategies and vice versa? Some explanation of how reported qualitative results were selected is required (in methods section) as the presentation does not appear to adhere to standard qualitative reporting methodologies.

Discussion

First paragraph is appears to be results (qualitative evaluation) rather than discussion. This information should be reported in the results section and made clear whether it is derived from the focus group discussions or from researcher impressions/informal feedback from participants and staff.

Second paragraph – reports on results not presented in the paper

Third paragraph – need to tie these comments back to your results ie. do your retention rates support that this was an important feature – were they higher than usual? The majority of your loss to follow-ups were due to disconnected phones - an indication that the incentives may not have worked?

Pg 14 – sentence beginning “Findings of the current study…” would benefit from greater discussion. Do you mean to say that even with the measures taken in the current study, retention was low? Discussion of what might constitute extraordinary measures would be useful.

Some comment on the generalisability of your results to studies in different population groups would be useful.
Minor Essential Revisions

There are a few minor grammatical errors – a general proof read would be beneficial.

Background
First paragraph – “less optimal” than what? Or do you mean “less than optimal”?
Second paragraph, last sentence – needs proof-reading
Third paragraph – mention of the collaborative relationship is not necessary. Description of WIC services would fit better in first paragraph of methods.
Final paragraph – it is not clear what is meant by “baseline/follow-up”

Methods
Procedure – please include actual dates of data collection (eg January-June 2008)
Intervention - Some description of the PSGTs would be useful
Measures – it is unclear how the diet measures were used/combined to generate the variables reported in the results section. Was the 24-hr recall used at all? If not it’s not necessary (and actually confusing) to include it here.
Measures – It is unclear how (and if) item scores for diet, physical activity and psychological variables were transformed to scale scores (eg. were the 6 physical activity items summed to create a single physical activity variable?).
Measures – please explain the acronym CESD. This is the only measure where established validity and reliability is mentioned. Where other measures have established validity and/or reliability, this should be noted.
Measures – please include who took height and weight measurements – not clear if this was trained researchers or WIC staff (were they trained for this?)
Measures – how were the 12 participants involved in the focus groups selected? What was the intervention vs control group, BMI and racial spread? Were any of these participants drop outs?
Were demographics collected via survey or from WIC records?

Results
The information on numbers providing change of address and telephone information would be more useful if this were related to the numbers of participants who actually experienced change in this information during the study period.
It is unclear why a 10-unit change in depression score is used but single-unit change in stress score. This should be explained in the methods section.
Was stress associated with late drop out, stress only at that timepoint, or was earlier stress accounted for?

Discussion
Points 4 & 7 seem similar, please clarify the distinction.

Discretionary Revisions

Results
It would be informative to compare retention rates for participants in the control and intervention groups.
Did any participants drop out during the intervention phase?
A table summarising the main results would be useful eg. scores for retained vs non-retained

Discussion
Pg 14 – Suggest clarifying your message by rewording sentence to “The potential for retention failures was relatively high in our study because we enrolled participants whose characteristics have previously been associated with lower retention: non-white.....”

Rather than outlining how you will change your main study, informed by the results reported in this paper, it may be more useful to outline general suggestions for intervention studies in similar populations. This is likely to be more useful to readers.