Author's response to reviews

Title: Physical inactivity as a policy problem: Applying a concept from policy analysis to a public health issue

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Author's response to reviews:

Dear Editors,

Thank you very much for your positive feedback concerning our manuscript “Physical activity promotion as a policy problem: Applying a concept from policy analysis to a public health issue”.

As an attachment, we are sending you a revised version of the manuscript that is based on the reviews by Dr. Gleeson and Dr. Anokye. We would like to thank the two reviewers for taking the time to review the manuscript. We have found their comments to be extremely valuable and believe that they have enabled us to improve the manuscript considerably.

Specifically, we have made the following the adjustments to the manuscript:

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REVIEWER 1 (Dr. Gleeson):

Comment 1:

"The authors use Peters’ analytic scheme to explore physical activity promotion (“PAP”) as a policy problem. However PAP, if Peters’ conceptualization is correctly applied, is not a policy problem in itself but rather a set of interventions, policy instruments or policy responses designed to address the policy problem of physical inactivity. PAP could also be understood to have a number of policy problems associated with it (e.g. the limited effectiveness of PAP programs). But it does not make sense to construct PAP itself as a policy problem."
If physical activity promotion (PAP) is taken as the policy problem, several core arguments of the paper are problematic – e.g. how can PAP be chronic in nature (p. 2); how can it be ‘solved’ (p. 8-9, 19)?

The paper’s lack of clarity about the policy problem being explored reduces the value of the insights it generates. The paper needs some reframing throughout to clarify the policy problem that is being explored."

We would like to thank the reviewer for this extremely valuable comment. We agree that building the argument around “physical inactivity” as a policy problem eschews a number of theoretical problems and improves the clarity of our argument. We have revised the manuscript accordingly and substituted “physical inactivity” for “physical activity promotion” throughout the paper when characterizing the policy problem.

Comment 2:

"Minor essential revisions

Page 3, line 2, insert “A” before “Medline”

Page 4, line 11, close bracket before [14,15]"

The respective corrections have been made.

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REVIEWER 2 (Dr. Anokye):

Comment 1:

"Justify the use of Peters’ recommended set of seven variables that characterises policy problems. Why not other tool(s) that might exist?"

We agree that a section discussing policy problem literature is very valuable. We have added a short discussion of the literature on “policy problems” and on our reasons for choosing Peters’ approach at the beginning of the section entitled “Physical inactivity as a policy problem”.

Comment 2:

"Clarify a particular national context(s) within which the authors are speaking into. This is particularly important given that contextual factors impact the
characterisation of a policy problem."

We agree that the question of contexts is very important. A central aspect of our argument is that certain characteristics of physical inactivity as a policy problem are inherent in the nature of the phenomenon and apply in any context, but that context variables may shape the expression of variables in specific contexts. In addition, political actors may want to influence the definition of physical inactivity as a policy problem. We have further elaborated this argument in the section entitled “Physical activity as a policy problem”, and have added several paragraphs to the discussion to address context-related aspects of the policy problem.

Comment 3:

"Extensive examples, where feasible, to substantiate the characterisation of physical activity as a policy problem"

We would like to thank the reviewer for this very important comment, and agree that the article will clearly benefit from case examples underlining our argument. We have added a number of examples to illustrate each of the seven variables, drawing both on policy documents, research results and experiences from physical activity promotion projects.

Comment 4:

"Comment on the timeliness of this debate into formally structuring physical activity as a policy problem - e.g. Is it particularly pertinent given that policy targets are not being achieved in certain countries?"

We have made some additions in the introduction to emphasize the need for improved tools to analyze physical activity policies, including a better understanding of the nature of physical inactivity as a policy problem. In particular, we believe the debate is timely because research indicates that there are shortcomings both in the formulation and implementation of current national physical activity policies.

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ADDITIONAL REVISIONS:

Editors – Comment 1:

"On top of the comments by the reviewers the Chief Editors of HARPS would like you to please highlight the role of the research evidence in the translation of
problems to policies."

We have added a paragraph to the discussion section to address the role that scientists and their research results might play in the policy development process. In particular, we discuss the question of appropriate interaction mechanisms between researchers and policy-makers to maximize the integration of research results in physical activity promotion policies.

Editors – Comment 2:

"Further please change the article type from research to review."

We have changed the article type accordingly.

Shortened introduction:

In addition to the changes outlined above, we propose to delete the section in the introduction that discusses the details of the HEPA concept. We believe that this would help streamline the main argument of the article in its current form and also help balance (in terms of word count) the additions that were made in response to the reviewers’ comments.

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We sincerely hope that you and the reviewers will find our manuscript suitable for publication in HARPS in its current form. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any further comments or requests. We are looking very much forward to hearing from you.

With kind regards

The authors