Reviewer's report

Title: Feasibility of multi-sector policy measures that create activity-friendly environments for children: results of a Delphi study

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Reviewer: Fiona Bull

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1. Is the question posed original, important and well defined?
   The research questions posed by the authors are of importance to help progress this field of research and public health practice forward. Currently there is a lot of descriptive data on what environmental attributes could and should be changed to support increased level of physical activity and this paper reports research that looks forward to addressing the challenges of how to change and what policy and intervention levers might be used. In doing so, this paper has the additional focus of assessing the important issue of the feasibility of different levers. The paper builds on the latest research findings from observational and theoretical work in this field and contributes to the literature in two ways. Firstly the findings themselves highlight potentially feasible interventions suitable at the local level which have potential for broader application, and secondly in the methods used to identify, sort and rank these interventions.

2. Are the data sound and well controlled?
   This study was undertaken in The Netherlands and in four selected communities. It is unclear how these four communities were selected from the larger pool of potential communities. However data are presented to show the comparability of these communities on selected indicators and how they compare to national statistics. The purpose of this study is to compare and contrast the lists of interventions generated by the participants from each of the four communities, no control communities are required.

3. Is the interpretation (discussion and conclusion) well balanced and supported by the data?
   The data interpretation is relevant and unbiased. Overall the conclusions drawn from the study are valid, linked with other relevant research and have practical implications. The strengths and limitations are presented as well several important ways in which future studies along these lines could be extended. Several suggestions for some clarifications are listed below.

4. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to allow others to evaluate and/or replicate the work?
   The methods are clear but further details would provide more clarity on the stepped approach to the Delphi techniques. However, overall the methodology
used is sound and applicable to the research question.

5. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the methods?

The strengths of the methods used in this study include: the use of multiple communities; the multidisciplinary and multi sector perspective gained by the diverse recruitment of participants from different fields of public office; the multiple steps of the Delphi method; the use of the 5 classification system for different types of feasibility; the separation of local community and regional perspective and scores.

The weaknesses of the methods include: only four communities and only mid size communities were included; only 3 attributes of the environment were considered (social cohesion, access, traffic safety); and as noted by the authors that the potential impact of the intervention was not included in the decision making and scoring matrix.

Major Compulsory Revisions

none

Minor Essential Revisions

Abstract - background – the statement of the purpose of the study is abbreviated here in the abstract but it is much more clearly stated in the main paper on page 6. It is recommended that a more detailed statement of the aim is presented in the abstract to better communicate the two elements of the study.

Methods – First Round Delphi – more justification for the selection of the three attributes and why only three is needed in this paragraph. Also more detail is needed on what explanations were provided to guide the group in round 1 - this issue is of some importance as it is raised later and used to explain differences in results between communities. It would be useful for the reader to know what type and level of detail of the material provided by the professional discussion leader to facilitate the session.

Methods – Second round – It is not clear if this second round was completed on the same day and as part of the same session as round 1 Delphi. It appears to be the case but the confusion arises when the methods describe “subsequently” the questionnaire was administered. It is suggested that the administration of the round 2 delphi is clarified by providing more specific statements on when and where round 2 and round 1 took place.

Methods - round 3 - the same issue of clarification is suggested for round 3. How long after round1/2 was the postal survey sent?

Data analysis – first paragraph – consider clarifying that the score were computed for Delphi round 2 and 3 and this could be written as such where as currently it is ‘per Delphi round’. This is not the case Delphi round one generated the lists and no scoring took place.
Results – Second paragraph – the latter part of this paragraph refers to ‘data not shown’. There are two issues here. Firstly, it would seem useful to add to Table 3 the data from round 2 and thus show the scores of both round 2 and round 3, particularly if the authors wish to remark on and later discuss the ‘change’ in these scores and what might have influenced these changes (see discussion paragraph 2). Secondly, it suggested that the reporting of the change in scores should be presented later in the result section. The reader is firstly interested and needs to be orientated to the complex data set in table 3 before being told about results which are reported without data. Therefore, it is suggested that the authors consider some reorganisation of the results section to highlight results on the nature of the measures identified (currently positioned in paragraph 3), the number of ‘highly consistent / low consistent’; and the pattern of measures (where more than one community identified the same or similar intervention lever.

Discussion –

The change in the scores resulting from the use of the Delphi method is one aspect of the discussion and is related to aim #2 – measure of feasibility and change in these assessments. It is suggested that the author consider whether this should be presented as the first aspect of the discussion or later in the Discussion section. The other results reported and discussed refer to aim #1 – to identify a set of policy measures. It may be helpful to the reader to order the aims, the presentation of the results and the order of discussion points to reflect these two agendas – currently they are somewhat mixed across the paper. This would allow the authors to communicate the intended priority focus of the paper and/or provide a logic for the reader if there is no priority between aims 1 and 2. The intent to this reader is to identify and score the feasibility of a set of policy interventions. That there were changes in scores between round 2 and round 3 on feasibility is and was expected, but this study appears to have insufficient data to explore the causes and explain why score changed. This is therefore of interest but a lesser focus. If the authors disagree, then greater clarification is required within the paper.

Discretionary Revisions

Introduction - para 4 – 2nd aim of the study should be stated more clearly. The aim is to assess the feasibility of the measures across multiple dimensions – although I would suggest that one could omit the ‘multiple aspects’ or multiple dimensions’ from this statement as this becomes clear later in the paper.

Methods – 1st paragraph – “showed much resemblance” could be simple stated as ‘were similar’

Delphi methods – 1st paragraph – ‘controlled statistical opinion (group) feedback’ seems a complicated way of saying the ‘groups mean score’ – consider simplifying this.

Methods – First Round Delphi –“(20 minutes/determinate)” do the authors mean
that 20 minutes was allocated to each of the 3 topics – I suggest this is stated in full.
Check the spelling of ‘weight’ throughout manuscript as often the ‘t’ is missing
Table 3 – label of column one might read ‘measure DEVELOPED in …’ rather than derived from

6. Can the writing, organization, tables and figures be improved?
The manuscript is well written with only a few errors requiring correction. Overall the structure of the paper and the order of presentation of material is logical, clear and appropriate. There are several suggestions presented below regarding the presentation of results which can be considered.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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