Reviewer's report

Title: How comprehensive are literature reviews investigating community interventions to promote physical activity? A review of reviews

Version: 1 Date: 12 March 2012

Reviewer: Philip Baker

Reviewer's report:

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?

The research question is interesting and seeks to answer their questions about important issues pertaining to reviews which promote physical activity.

Given the approach to identify the systematic reviews uses an earlier study that is a systematic map of reviews (published in 2008), the search is likely to be at least 4 years old. Hence this manuscript is a description of earlier, rather contemporary systematic reviews. (Please note that the search date is not stated in the present manuscript).

The research questions stated in Background Para 8 are helpful.

Minor Essential Revisions

1.1. The manuscript could benefit by explaining more clearly limits to generalise the findings.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?

Minor Essential Revisions

2.1. The authors may wish to consider providing further details of the inclusion criteria in Methods section.

2.2. The method using an earlier mapping review in theory seems to be a practical approach, building upon earlier work. Although the approach is convenient, using an earlier search strategy has resulted in a set of reviews that is limited in currency and comprehensiveness. For example, it is unclear why the authors omitted a well-known Community Guide review, Khan 2002, Community based campaigns for physical activity (http://www.thecommunityguide.org/pa/campaigns/community.html).

Furthermore, basing the current paper upon an earlier review strategy omits more recent reviews on the topic such as Baker 2011 (Baker PRA, Francis DP, Soares J, Weightman AL, Foster C. Community wide interventions for increasing physical activity. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2011, Issue 4. Art. No.: CD008366. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD008366.pub2.). It would be helpful for the authors to address the limitations of their approach in the methods.
section.

Major Compulsory Revisions

2.3. The authors have used a tool by DARE which seems to classify the reviews as systematic or non systematic. The references provided for this tool is inadequate. Importantly, it is unclear how this tool is a quality assessment tool as several places in the manuscript the authors refer to the reviews as “high quality” (I can not find a description on the DARE website indicating it is a quality assessment tool, although I haven’t looked extensively).

2.4. A much better and useful approach for the authors to consider would be to quality score the included reviews with a recognised tool such as AMSTAR, Health-evidence.ca or CASP for appraising systematic reviews (e.g. http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_64047_en.pdf)

2.5. Background para 4; the authors state “Since all the reviews are about the same issue”. This is difficult to ascertain from Table 2 and it is unclear whether the definitions of “community intervention” are similar enough to compare and draw conclusions as it is so loosely defined.

2.6. Methods, para 1 states that the systematic map was about “interventions to reduce childhood obesity”. Could it be possible that this aim is different than programs aimed at increasing populations levels of physical activity. An explanation is necessary.

3. Are the data sound and well controlled

Methods section, para 8, describes methods for data collection. No statistical analysis was undertaken, although scores of agreement between studies could be explored.

Discretionary Revisions

3.1. As stated above, it would be helpful if each review could be scored with one of the suggested tools and then be analysed further by their score.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

Yes the manuscript adheres to relevant standard for reporting and data deposition.

The tables (in their present form) could be improved for greater clarity.

Minor Essential Revisions (not for publication once the authors address)

(The tables all need better labeling to help the reader)

4.1. Table 1: Consider restructuring and including more information as it is difficult to grasp what the authors wish to communicate.
4.2. Table 2; the author could reformat the table as it is difficult to interpret. Table 2 does not indicate which reviews were Cochrane, although Results section, para 8 states two reviews were Cochrane Reviews.

4.3. Title of Table 2 has error “which met out inclusion criteria”

4.4. Table 4:

4.4.1. Title and labeling could be improved

4.4.2. Where there were conflicts between the studies,

4.5. Table 5:

Perhaps graded shading or reorganisation could help with interpretation of the table. Why is the first paper published in the centre of the table?

4.6. Table 6: The adequacy of the labels on this table could be improved to aid readers

4.7. Table 7: Readers would find improvement in titles and labels to be helpful. Difficult to follow in its current form.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

The author’s discussion are supported by the data and are interesting.

Minor essential revisions

5.1. The sections could benefit from better organisation and flow.

5.2. In Discussion, para 8, “Strengths of the study”, the authors state “First, our searches were far reaching and sensitive and our “community intervention” was broad”. It could be argued that a broad definition is problematic as the reviews have significant heterogeneity, and that this would result in different studies included. Heterogeneity makes it more difficult to compare reviews as there are answering different research questions (e.g. community wide vs. community based). In the Cochrane review by Baker 2011, “community-wide” is specifically defined to avoid this problem and a logic model is presented. It would be helpful for the authors to explore the definition of community further.

5.3. The particular elements of each intervention are not stated with enough detail for comparison. I suggest the authors look at Table 3 in as Baker 2011 as idea to help the readers understand the heterogeneity in the included studies (both primary studies and in the reviews). Understanding the heterogeneity might help explain some of the differences observed or may help support the current explanations and the author’s conclusions.

5.4. The authors might consider identify that many methodological issues in public health reviews are have been addressed by the Cochrane Public Health Group, and how this work may result in improvements in future reviews of public health. (It is interesting to note that earlier reviews score highest were Cochrane
reviews. The authors may wish to elaborate on this).

6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?

Minor essential revisions
6.1. The authors should reconsider the title of the paper which presently seems inconsistent with the contents of the heading “background”.

6.2. In the Abstract, the Background section could be enhanced as it is particularly brief and presents only the research question

7. Is the writing acceptable?
Improvements could be made in the clarity of the text in several sections:

Minor essential revisions (not for publication)
The authors may wish to consider improving the clarity in the following sections:
7.1. Background, para 1, sentence 1: change Theories to principles
7.2. Results para 1
7.3. Discussion para 5, the para beginning “There was little-cross citation…”
7.4. Conclusion para 2

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I am author of a Cochrane systematic review on Community-wide interventions for increasing Physical Activity (Baker et al 2011) and I have suggested the authors look at some of the issues we encountered in our review. I have no conflict of interest as my review is not included in the present research as the date of its publication comes after the date of the literature search.