Reviewer’s report

Title: The World Health Organization’s Health Promoting Schools framework: a Cochrane systematic review and meta-analysis

Version: 2  Date: 28 July 2014

Reviewer: John Lowe

Reviewer’s report:

Major Compulsory Revisions

This manuscript is an interesting one from position of the repeat of a similar study conducted in 1999. However, what was disappointing to this reviewer was that with 15 more years of studies that were conducted on this framework, the conclusions are the same. It was also a disappointing to note that issues raised 15 years ago have not been addressed by researchers in this area. There appearances to have been no improvement in methods or types of methods for data collection with this 15 year period. One might expect to have this discussed in the discussion section.

The methods that were used in the review are solid and reasonably sound. The focus of this review will be on the conclusion presented in the discussion section and the overly positive terminology used. The section should be rewritten with the following comments.

On page 12, the authors after presenting several pages of outcomes stating no evidence, concluded “our analysis showed positive intervention effects”. The positive results indicate a reduction in BMI that no reduction in the Z BMI. This is an area that should be enlightened in the manuscript. Is the addition of 3 min of moderate-to-vigourous activity per day clinically important either to general physical health or obesity?

While the next statement indicates a lack of effectiveness, there was weak evidence for six areas, no evidence for seven areas and lack of data to be able to determine outcomes in five areas. It is difficult for this reviewer to then draw to their conclusion on page 15 “our review demonstrates the potential benefits of this approach for health”. It would seem appropriate to apply the same evidence based standards as is applied to other preventative activities. If the standard of the US Preventative Task force for evidence is applied, the same conclusion might not be reached.

The authors are in a unique position to clearly identify lessons learned over the past 15 years and not just the need to obtain educational outcomes data.

Minor Essential Revisions

Specifically, I was not able to locate in the tables a list of the 67 trials. This would be useful for the reader of knowledge.
Discretionary Revisions
Also, are more sensitive note, in the limitations, no acknowledgement was made of the authors competing interests and relationship the world health organisation. While this is a strength is also a limitation that should be acknowledged up front as it could influence the use of descriptive terminology.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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'