Reviewer’s report

Title: Determinants of physical activity and sedentary behaviour in university students: a qualitative study using focus group discussions

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Reviewer: Lara LaCaille

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Title: Determinants of physical activity and sedentary behavior in university students: a qualitative study using focus group discussions

Review: This manuscript presents a second set of qualitative results from a series of focus groups examining perceived determinants of changes in weight-related behaviors (i.e., eating, physical activity, and sedentary behavior) among college students. A total of 56 students participated in one of six focus groups. The authors divided the responses into those related to eating versus physical activity, and chose to submit these as separate manuscripts (the eating-related paper already being published). Personally, I’m troubled by this approach given that most of the determinants identified as contributing to changes in eating behavior are the same as those contributing to changing in physical activity, and thus a unified paper seems much more appropriate. However, I will leave it to the discretion of the editor to determine the acceptability of this practice within this journal.

That being said, the paper itself is generally well-written and the data analytic methods are well described and appear sound. Much of what is presented in the paper has been previously identified and described by a number of other recent qualitative studies using the same methodology and similar college student population. However, their inclusion of sedentariness as a separate behavior is novel and interesting, as is their probing about possible intervention strategies.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. pg 6, participants were recruited using snowball sampling. This method seems entirely inappropriate for this type of study, as it is usually reserved for situations in which a trait one is researching is quite rare. In this case, using subjects who know one another seems to be a serious limitation to the generalizability of the findings beyond the group assessed. At a minimum, the authors should describe the rationale for choosing this method of recruitment (with citations) and include discussion of this approach within the limitations.

2. Pg 12, the authors refer to certain sedentary behaviors as “addictive.” This is a strong word choice and one that is often misused. The authors are asked to review this language and either use “quotes” if it refers to the participants exact word choice and use different terminology to describe these behaviors. (Is it that there is an absorbing quality to these activities? Does it feel as though there is a
compulsion to engage in the behavior?)

3. Abstract and page 14, the authors refer to moderation in both the abstract and the discussion, but there is no description within the methods about how moderating factors were identified. This is interesting to consider in a qualitative paper, and more background about this is needed.

Min-ext-Essential Revisions

1. pg 4 line 69 “fatness” should be “fat”
2. pg 5 line 75, eliminate double reference (16)
3. pg 5 line 81, insert “the” between “In” and “literature”
4. pg 5 line 96, “profound” does not seem to be the appropriate term
5. pg 6 line 111, “till” should be “through”
6. pg 7 line 151, delete “before”
7. pg 9, line 192, “have been” should be “were”
8. pg 10 line 210, insert “the” before “university”
9. pg 12 line 263, delete parenthesis
10. pg 12 line 264, replace “by” with “with”
11. pg 13 line 294, delete “for”
12. pg 13 line 296 insert “for” after “opting”
13. pg 16 line 374 change “choice” to “decision”

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.