Reviewer’s report

Title: Needs Assessment of School and Community Physical Activity Opportunities in Rural West Virginia: The McDowell CHOICES planning effort

Version: 2 Date: 17 December 2014

Reviewer: Estelle Lambert

Reviewer's report:

BMC Public Health Review Report:

Needs Assessment of School and Community Physical Activity Opportunities in Rural West Virginia: The McDowell CHOICES planning effort

Is the question posed original, important and well defined?

The CHOICES project was aimed at increasing opportunities for physical activity in a socioeconomically disadvantaged county in West Virginia. This study was designed to “establish baseline knowledge of currently available resources and utilities of existing opportunities for physical activity in McDowell County, and consistent with the social action model of community organizing, a comprehensive needs assessment using both qualitative and quantitative methods was carried out.”

The authors go on to explain that the study is grounded in “the social action model in community organizing, which is a task and process-oriented model, where external expertise is provided to assist communities to both identify problems and set common goals to overcome them, as well as to develop strategies to mobilize existing resources to influence positive development.“ They highlighted the key areas of focus which were “issue selection, community capacity, and empowerment”.

While this type of work has been undertaken before, this study provides a good example of formative research, which can be used to develop a multi-level, intersectoral, community-based intervention for increasing physical activity, at a population level.

Are the data sound and well controlled?

There is the potential for selection bias or “speaking to the converted” as the students were recruited on the basis of being willing to complete a physical activity interest survey. It is difficult to evaluate the focus group data, as the analysis was not described in any detail.

Is the interpretation (discussion and conclusion) well balanced and supported by the data?

As much as this can be ascertained with the minimal description of the focus
are qualities and qualitative research analysis, it would seem to be supported. The most salient outcome appears to be the potential for use of the schools under some joint agreement structure.

Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to allow others to evaluate and/or replicate the work?

The analysis of the focus group data and interviews should be provided in greater detail.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the methods?

Using mixed methods, from survey to qualitative is a strength; but there is potential for respondent or selection bias.

Can the writing, organization, tables and figures be improved?

The tables were well produced and self explanatory.

Specific comments:

Major Compulsory Revisions:

The analysis strategy of the qualitative research must be expanded and explained in more detail. How were themes identified? How as the summary arrived at?

Minor Essential Revisions:

The tense seemed to alternate particularly in the introduction. Perhaps this can be reviewed.

Discretionary Revisions:

No additional.

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

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.