Reviewer's report

Title: How active are people in parks? An observational study of park visitation

Version: 1 Date: 19 April 2015

Reviewer: Jason Bocarro

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Major Compulsory Revisions:

1. The authors make the case that what is “unique” about their study is that most of the studies conducted in Australia have been conducted in neighborhood parks and not regional parks. To make this study worth publishing, my suggestion would be to incorporate the data relating to post intervention (see comment below). As the article stands, I see very little that adds to the current body of literature – new knowledge. Many of the findings are unsurprising and reflective of many past studies (e.g., higher percentage of users in high SES parks, less females using the parks, adults having lower levels of PA than children, parks having majority of sedentary activity, etc - lines 150-177). So what new knowledge does this study add? For example, in lines 204-206 you state that park users in high SES parks were more likely to be engaged in MVPA or VPA than users in low SES parks – why is this surprising given past studies?

2. I gather this study is part of an intervention (natural experiment) where the authors examined the impact of the installation of a new playground. However, as they point out later – this data was collected prior to the installation of the new playground. My strong suggestion would be to use the data after the installation and make that the focus of the study. Also, was that the only renovation? If so can you explain your note up front where you cite that this study attempts to examine more widespread use of parks and yet the major renovation focused on children (a playground). Line 87-88 talk about park refurbishment to attract visitors but as far as I can see the only refurbishment was the installation of a playground – can you explain?

3. Some background demographic information of the parks need to be provided up front – later in the article the authors bring in contextual information about why certain issues might explain different patterns in behavior – it would be nice to understand a little behind the make-up of these parks (surrounding community)

4. Can you describe a regional park better for non-Australian readers? What are the size ranges of regional parks compared to neighborhood parks?

5. Lines 92-94 – only 2 parks both of which are very different in size. Why should we not be concerned that you have 2 parks in your study – doesn’t this significantly limit the generalizability and power of your results? Also your data is cross sectional which further limits the generalizability and discussion/implications.
6. You make the statement “It is important to promote physical activity in the park – that’s a very generalized finding. What does your study suggest that could provide more insightful and interesting guidance for park planners, practitioners, and others who manage these resources? What is it about your data that suggests promoting PA will be a meaningful strategy?

7. You acknowledge that this data used was collected prior to the implementation of the new playground. Including the data related to the refurbishment would be much more interesting and meaningful and you can use this data as baseline. Simply including the data you have here does not make much of a contribution to the literature particularly given this study is limited to 2 parks.

8. Line 247 – you state that this study had numerous strengths. That is overreaching. You only list 3 strengths, 2 of which (inter-rater reliability and consistency in the measures are simply good research practice). This needs to be amended.

9. Overall, you need to refocus this article and reframe as a study examining the refurbishment and redevelopment of the park in the low SES area using this data as baseline. As it stands this data does not add anything new to the park based PA literature.

Minor Essential Revisions

1. Line 84 – improvements should be plural
2. Line 115 you have an additional “)” which should be removed (after the 60+ age group)
3. Line 292 – check the journal name associated with this reference
4. Line 322 in your references – you have included the year 2013 twice
5. Line 323 – reference is incorrect you have an author “E. Jay” listed – no such person.
6. You need to capitalize the first letters after a colon (see lines 295, 315, 317, 324)

**Level of interest:** An article of insufficient interest to warrant publication in a scientific/medical journal

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests