Reviewer's report

Title: Translational research: Are community-based child obesity treatment program scalable?

Version: Date: 1 May 2015

Reviewer: JF J Lisón

Reviewer's report:

MAJOR COMPULSORY REVISIONS
-Comment 1
This study investigated the outcomes of translating a small successful efficacy child obesity treat program (MEND) in the real world. The study is appropriate for this journal. The topic is relevant given the importance of translational research for progressing public health and translating evidence from efficacy trials into practice. However, my biggest concern involves the lack of a control group. A major limitation of uncontrolled trials is the absence of a randomly selected comparison group, making these trials unsuitable for fully evaluating the efficacy of a new treatment/intervention. Uncontrolled trials are intrinsically weak evaluative designs, as secular trends or sudden changes make it difficult to attribute observed changes to the intervention. There is also evidence to suggest that the results of uncontrolled before and after studies may overestimate the effects of interventions. The fact that the intervention have demonstrated efficacy through a previous randomized controlled trial (MEND) does not ensure the efficacy (internal validity) of the present study; the efficacy of one study depends on its own design... Therefore, the lack of a control group should be clearly added as a limitation of the study.

-Comment 2
Methods, Outcome measures (first paragraph): Were outcomes measures (both first and last) measured by the same trained facilitator? Please clarify. Different facilitators measuring (pre and post) the same participants may introduce bias.

-Comment 3
Figure 1: Please check the unit/values in the abscissa axis (most of these BMI values are not possible/real). On the other hand, the caption states that figure 1 represents “BMI distribution curves of completers (attended #75% of sessions)”, whereas in the second paragraph of the Results section the authors write: “In Figure 1, the pre and post BMI distribution of all children attending #1 session...”. Please clarify or eliminate the figure.

-Comment 4
The small differences in mean change values between Children attending #1 sessions and Children attending #75% sessions are unexpected to me (i.e. waist
circumference, BMI z-score, WtHtr, etc.). Maybe the mean attendance rate in the attending #1 sessions children group was close to 75% (15 sessions)... Including this rate would help to understand the differences. Please give further explanation.

MINOR ESSENTIAL REVISIONS

-Comment 5
Abstract: a full stop is lacking in the conclusions (behaviours The findings).

-Comment 6
Introduction: a full stop is lacking at the end of the second paragraph.

-Comment 7
Methods, participants: please clarify ages, ¿7-13 or 6-15 yrs.? please check first paragraph in the Results section.

-Comment 8
Methods, Outcome measures (second paragraph): please check if the reference [17] fits into the context.

-Comment 9
Methods, Outcome measures (second paragraph): typo (trial).

-Comment 10
Results (second and third paragraphs): some values in the text are repeated in tables 2 and 3. Please consider choosing the best way to present the results.

-Comment 11
Discussion, fifth paragraph: typo (values).

-Comment 12
Table 1: please check non-completers % girls value.

-Comment 13
Table 1: please check significant p values [different values vs Results section, first paragraph].

-Comment 14
Table 2 caption: the authors write: “attending >1 (n=2,650) and 75% of session”. Please correct (#1 and #75%). Same change (#75%) along the results section.

-Comment 15
Table 2: please correct the second heading of the table (Children attending #1 sessions seems to be incorrect).

-Comment 16
Table 2: please check Daily serves of fruit and vegetables p values [different values vs text in the Results section].

-Comment 17
Table 3: a bracket is missing in the figure caption.

-Comment 18
All the references need to be worked according to the journal rules.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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.