Reviewer’s report

Title: "You feel like you're part of something bigger": Exploring motivations for community garden participation in Melbourne, Australia

Version: 0 Date: 12 Nov 2018

Reviewer: Pauline Marsh

Reviewer's report:

Dear Jonathon, Emily and Aisling,

Thank you for the opportunity to review your work: an interesting phenomenological study that aims to explore the motivations for community garden participation and potential implications for broader public health policy. This research has potential to strengthen the place of community gardening in mainstream public health, particularly in the context of growing urbanisation and the associated disconnection this causes from nature and from each other, as well as an increasing understanding and awareness of socio-ecological determinants of health.

I have two suggestions for improvement that are principally about the theoretical and analytical aspects of the paper, and several suggestions for minor alterations and corrections which are outlined below.

The first point is the need to more clearly articulate a theoretical framework for your research, and to situate your analysis and discussion firmly within this. You mention two valid and important theoretical perspectives underpinning your design and analysis, both of which could be developed further as the framework for your discussion: urbanisation (and nature/others disconnection) and socio-ecological impacts on health. The inclusion of a public health definition which acknowledges the socio-political and ecological factors impacting on health outcomes would be beneficial, as well as reference to the theoretical framework throughout the discussion. Currently, the discussion takes a fairly benign approach of summarising the findings and stating how they are reinforced in existing literature. For a stronger discussion, articulate what it is that your findings add to current understandings of urbanisation, disconnection, and the socio-ecological determinants of physical, mental and cognitive health.

The second major point I would like to draw attention to is that in the abstract you claim the study contributes "unique exploratory insights on community gardening motivations and sustained involvement". Then in the introduction you suggest that the reason for this is the Australian data collected across multiple sites. This is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, there are existing Australian, and other, studies that have been conducted over multiple sites. Secondly, in its current form the paper does not adequately explore the significance of your research findings. This is partly related to the aforementioned point about theoretical context. Your analysis would be greatly strengthened by highlighting for the reader how the barriers and enablers to joining and staying involved - that you and your participants identify - impact on nature/self-disconnection, social-disconnection and health. Similarly, you suggest the need for
future quantitative research in this area, and cite similar calls from others. It would be valuable if you could explore this further, in relation to your own findings and analysis. That is, can you suggest particular quantitative approaches you think would be beneficial to increasing understanding of the role of community gardens in addressing the negative consequences of nature/self disconnection and the gaps in public health care.

Some minor suggestions follow.

Line 24: Re-consider the choice of keywords in the light of comments above

Line 111: I suggest collapsing the introduction and background sections into a single introductory section, and adding a new "theoretical framework" section. The discussion about the diversity of community gardens, and the definition that the authors adopt, needs to be earlier in the article, to prevent confusion.

Lines 37-42: Need to differentiate "community gardens" from school gardens or other types of purpose-specific gardens and to ensure inferences about the benefits are appropriate to each type.

Lines 73-75: Please check the wording of this quote

Line:151-154: Consider rewording to strengthen the impact of this research

Line 192: consider replacing "which" with "whom"

Table: Explain the N/A - not available?

Lines 203-206: Please reword these two sentences to improve clarity.

Line 207: Study Sites: Please add more detail about the community gardens that are the study sites in this research and how they relate to the definition of community gardens chosen. This will help the reader to contextualise the findings.

Line 213: consider "Themes generated by our analysis highlight …"

Line 338: There is an awkward use of ellipses here - please reconsider

Line 342: The opening sentence is confusing.

Lines 421-429: Nature connectedness and cost-effective food production (environmental justice) are being conflated here. Either consider separating these into two separate points, or articulate more clearly how your research demonstrates the connections between community gardening, environmental justice and principles of biophilia.

Lines 484-491: This paragraph is a little confusing.

Please attend to the grammatical (particularly comma and semi-colon usage) and typographical errors before publication.
Recommendation: Publication subject to revisions as outlined above.

With kind regards,

Pauline Marsh

**Are the methods appropriate and well described?**
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Does the work include the necessary controls?**
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?**
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?**
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

**Quality of written English**
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

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