Reviewer’s report

Title: Smoke-free-school-hours at vocational education and training schools in Denmark: Attitudes among managers and teaching staff – a national cross-sectional study

Version: 0 Date: 20 Apr 2019

Reviewer: Shane Allwright

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This is a well written paper using survey data collected for other purposes to attempt to gain insights into support for implementation of SFSH polices in VET's.

However, I have concerns about the question used to assess attitudes towards SFSH in order to answer objectives one and two ("1) assess attitudes towards implementing SFSH among managers and staff at Danish VET schools, 2) examine what is associated with managers' and staffs' attitudes towards implementing SFSH"). This question reads:

"Where do you think the school should be in two years in relation to SFSH?"

The respondent is offered four possible responses to this key question:

1) the school has implemented SFSH, 2) the school is in the process of implementing SFSH, 3) the school is not about to implement SFSH, and 4) do not know. These responses were then "recoded to reflect 1) favourable, 2) somewhat favourable, 3) not favourable or 4) indecisive attitudes towards SFSH."

These four response options, rather than assessing the respondent's attitude, assess the actual situation with respect to SFSH in the respondent's school. Unless this is a translation issue, I see this as a flaw that undermines the analyses relating to the first two objectives of the paper. (Assessing attitudes would surely require the responses to be phrased differently e.g. 1) the school should implement SFSH, 2) the school should not implement SFSH, 3) do not know do /no opinion.)

Each school was characterised as "in favour" or "less in favour of SFSH" according to the principal manager's attitude towards SFSH. "The principal manager's attitude was used because it is a management decision as to whether a Danish VET school will implement SFSH." (P9 line 166) Again, these responses reflect the actual school situation rather than attitude per se, but given that the decision to implement SFSH is dictated by the principal manager, in this case the situation may in fact reflect the manager's attitude. The analyses that address objective 3) "explore the differences in health promotion environments among VET schools based on management's attitudes towards SFSH" may therefore be valid.
Minor comments

It would be clearer to refer throughout to 'teaching staff' rather than 'staff'.

Abstract Conclusion

"Conclusion: If management had a favourable attitude towards implementing SFSH, the school tended to have a higher focus on promoting a healthy work environment. Thus, implementing other health promotion activities and policies might be an important first step to establish readiness to implement SFSH." As the health promotion activities and policies pre-dated the survey and the question on SFSH, the first sentence might be better to rephrased as "existing health promotion facilities and activities were associated with a favourable attitude towards implementing SFSH". Healthy work environment is surely the explanatory variable.

Methods

Asking the principal manager to select other managers and teaching staff seems fraught with opportunities for bias as mentioned by the authors in the Limitations section. However, the sampling procedures and questionnaire appear to have been designed for another purpose so the authors presumably had no say in how the participants were selected,

Editing

There are very few typos. Some minor edits required e.g. "staffs' attitudes".

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?
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