Reviewer’s report

Title: Mixed methods evaluation of an employer-led, free lunch initiative in Northern Ireland

Version: 0 Date: 17 May 2019

Reviewer: Sarah A Smith

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this interesting paper. This is an important paper examining the acceptance and effectiveness of an employer-led initiative to provide free, healthy lunches to employees. It is of particular interest having been conducted in a small, UK based workplace, and the lunch provided being free. The findings of this paper will be of interest to researchers designing workplace health promotion/dietary interventions and of value to management/stakeholders in workplaces currently without onsite catering facilities looking to implement a food provision initiative.

The manuscript is well written and easy to understand. My comments and recommendations for the authors' to consider relate mainly to the methods section and data analysis and include:

Identify if and how theory informed the work (i.e. grounded theory, ethnography, case study etc.) and state which theory was used.

Provide information on the format of the interviews, including which tools were used in the interviews (i.e. topic guides).

Provide information as to how the interviews were structured. In methods, lines 127 - 131, the authors' state:

'Interview questions were adapted from previous qualitative studies [7, 10, 16]. Questions regarding improvement suggestions were included at follow-up. Interviews with stakeholders who were involved with organising the food court were similar to employee interviews and also included questions assessing their motivation to provide healthy lunches.'

It would be helpful to describe how the questions and interview structure were decided and by whom? Was this structure piloted/reviewed and adapted during data collection? If yes, please describe any adaptations.

State when the interviews were conducted (i.e. months/year).

Were interviewers and interviewees known to one another? State their relationship.

It would be helpful to include how long each interview lasted, report the mean length of the interviews and the range.
More information is required on interview analysis. The interviews were analysed how and by whom? How were coders trained? How were codes developed?

State whether coders were independent, whether they were in agreement/disagreement, was any validation by a third coder required?

Please describe any techniques employed to reduce bias in the methods.

Please clarify if, and amend if required, the figures are correct from baseline to follow-up for interview participants;

Results, line 199. Authors' state:

'Employees (n 10) and four key stakeholder were interviewed at baseline'

And at follow-up, results, line 222. Author's state:

'Eleven employees from the IS and the same three stakeholders were interviewed at follow-up'

The authors raise an interesting point in the introduction, lines 32-34:

'Research suggests that employers may play an important role in facilitating healthy eating and that management support seems key for workplace wellbeing interventions to be successful'

With this in mind, could the authors’ elaborate on the justification for not involving management in the planning and delivery of the initiative? Could the importance of engaging management for the success of an initiative such as this be further emphasised in the conclusions/recommendations for future research perhaps?

Provide a justification why only full-time workers were included in the study sample. Excluding other members of the workforce (i.e. part-time, shift workers etc.) can contribute to creating intervention-generated inequalities (IGIs). Should this be acknowledged as a limitation/consideration for future practice?

Suggest re-wording or shortening of the sentence for clarity for the reader in Discussion, lines 317-320

'Analysis of the diet and health measures of workers in the IS who had the lunches compared to workers who did not have the lunches and meal composition analysis of meals prepared at work compared to those prepared at home would also be of interest.'

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.

I am able to assess the statistics

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

Acceptable

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