

Reviewer's report

Title: Municipal policies and plans of action aiming to promote physical activity and healthy eating habits among school children in Sweden: a cross sectional study

Version: 1 **Date:** 27 March 2009

Reviewer: Amelia Lake

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for asking me to review this important and interesting paper which explores the issue of policy through to practice in terms of promoting physical activity and healthy food habits in school age children.

I enjoyed reading this paper and have a few comments and suggestions. I have labelled my suggestions as either MCR/ MEC/ DR.

- MCR: Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
- MER: Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
- DR: Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)

Abstract

MCR : It would be helpful to specify what age you mean in the abstract.

Conclusions –

‘Policy documents and plans of action aiming to promote physical activity and healthy eating

habits among school children in municipalities and town districts in Stockholm County did

not seem to have impact on the local level of activity’

MER: The use of the word ‘activity’ is a bit confusing – could be interpreted as meaning physical activity, rather than activity around promoting physical activity.

Background

MCR: It would be helpful to give a brief bit of background as to who is responsible for promoting physical activity and healthy eating in Sweden. Is it solely the responsibility of the municipality or town district or are there national policies from other bodies and other departments? As this is an international audience this background information would be helpful and does not need to be very extensive.

DR: Page 3 - Paragraph 1: ‘Area of residence’ – change to place of residence.

Page 3 - Paragraph 1: ‘Strong socioeconomic gradients with higher prevalence of

overweight and obesity among children and adolescents from disadvantaged groups have been reported among children and adolescents in e.g.'

MER: remove e.g.

MCR: Generally there is a lack of clarity about what age groups you mean as children and as adolescents.

I would consider 11-15 as early adolescence...it would be helpful to define what you mean.

DR: One might argue that adults are also constrained by societal and cultural factors. I think your decision to focus on childhood is easily justified. The review by Flynn is an extremely useful reference as is Livingston.

[Flynn, M.A.T., et al., Reducing obesity and related chronic disease risk in children and youth: a synthesis of evidence with 'best practice' recommendations. *Obesity Reviews*, 2006. 7(s1): p. 7-66.] [Livingstone, M.B.E., T.A. McCaffrey, and K.L. Rennie, Childhood obesity prevention studies: lessons learned and to be learned. *Public Health Nutrition*, 2006. 9(8A): p. 1121-9.]

MCR: 'Such structures can be either obesogenic, meaning that they prevent or hinder unhealthy behaviours, or leptogenic, meaning that they encourage healthy behaviours [10, 11].'

The highlighted unhealthy should be healthy.

MER: I think the Swinburn Angelo framework would be useful to describe here (in the background) – taking about changes at a political level. [as I read on I notice it is in the methods section, can I suggest that it is put earlier in the background and then re-referred to?]

MCR: Can you define what age group you mean by school age children? Does it include adolescents.

MEC: Page 3 I think there has been a movement to appreciate the broader understanding for quite a few years and models of this broader understanding exist for example the Whitehead & Dahlgren (1991) paper is often quoted.

[Whitehead, M. and G. Dahlgren, What can be done about inequalities in health? *The Lancet*, 1991. 338(8774): p. 1059-1063.]

Methods

MCR: I am interested to know how and why you chose your methods, for example to use questionnaires to collect the information rather than interviews?

'Indicators were developed and survey questions constructed in order to capture the work

carried out by the municipalities at a structural level to facilitate for children and adolescents

to be physically active and to develop healthy eating habits.'

This is the really interesting & challenging bit – how did you develop these indicators and questions?

Readers will also be interested in who you sent the questionnaire to in the offices – what kind of a response you got and was it difficult to obtain the information.

MER: Page 5: were you able to collect all the policy documents from all the areas?

The survey questions “Are there any policies aiming to promote physical activity and/or

healthy eating among school children?” and “Are there any plans of action aiming to

promote physical activity and/or healthy eating among school children?” were compared to

the collected policy documents and plans of action and coded in the following manner.

MCR: For the above – how many researchers were involved in checking the policy documents? If more than one researcher conducted this - were independent evaluations conducted and compared?

MCR: How did the researcher ascertain that the policy was being politically adopted?

Results

MCR: Page 6: ‘This could imply that in municipalities and town districts where public officials and politicians have a positive attitude to promotion of physical activity and healthy eating habits the more or better measures are taken to enhance the physical environment (e.g. maintenance of bike paths during winter time with snow).’

I think the above sentence requires re-writing to make it easier for readers.

MCR: Page 6: ‘the relatively pointless documents actually observed by the investigators when scrutinizing and comparing the responses with the attached documents. ‘

I think this is an important statement about agreement between the questionnaires and the policy documents – it would be helpful for the readers if it was made more clear.

Discussion

MCR: Page 7: ‘Policies of sufficient quality were rare’ – this statement needs further information. Quality compared with what? How were the policy documents scrutinised for quality?

MCR: Page 7: ‘Furthermore, structured public health work did not seem to be what it was told to be by the municipalities and town districts.’ I think this sentence needs to be re-written to make it clear what you mean.

References

DR: Reference 9 a newer survey exists which you may want to use:

1. Currie, C., et al., Inequalities in Young People's Health: HBSC International

Report from the 2005/2006 Survey. 2008.

Tables:

MCR: Table 2 end column text appears to be missing.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

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