

Moving The Field of Health Behaviour Research Forward with Genuine Application and Cross-Culture Assessment of Established Theoretical Models and Techniques

Editorial

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In this editorial, I would like to discuss two issues which are also development opportunities within the field of health behaviour research.

It is widely acknowledged that human health behaviours are influenced by a range of factors that operate and interact at both individual and environmental levels. Behavioural scientists and academics from various disciplines have attempted to identify those factors and described the relationships among them. The Environmental Research framework for weight Gain prevention (EnRG framework) [1], Ecological framework [2, 3] and the analysis grid for environments linked to obesity (ANGELO framework) [4] are just examples of established theoretical models for behavioural change or determination. Theories are useful tools created to help people understand complex issues and address the issues in a more systematic way [5]. However, even the ecological approach, a widely known theoretical model, has rarely been used in this field and for those studies that claimed to have adopted an ecological approach, none of them in fact have examined the relationships or interaction between the various influencing factors studied [6]. It's also arguable that the increasingly popular ‘intervention mapping’ approach implies an emphasis on linear bivariate relationships between behaviour determinants as it asks users to specify each behaviour determinant and develop specific strategies to change them.

When the complex nature of health behaviours and the interactive relationship among the multi-level determinants of those behaviours are acknowledged, and when established theoretical models are present, ***we should direct our efforts to truly apply***

plying, testing and further developing those existing tools to move this field forward. Cross-culture assessment of those behavioural change theories (predominantly developed in western societies) in other populations are particularly needed. ***Open publication may facilitate development on this area*** by removing the financial burden associated with the traditional fee-paying model of academic journal subscription or paper access among research-active readers from mid-low income countries or communities. Being able to know what behavioural theories have been developed and applied by scholars from scientifically more advanced countries would be the first step to encourage comparative or applicability testing research in non-western countries or under-studied populations.

Moreover, ***well established tools developed for the field of health behaviour research have not been adequately utilised in the development, delivery and evaluation of behavioural change interventions.*** Taking healthy lifestyle promotion as an example, while enormous resources have been spent in trials to evaluate the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of behavioural change programmes in improving people's health behaviour or health outcomes, and regardless the outcomes of those interventions, it remains unclear as to which specific intervention components (or a combination of them) contributed to the observed outcome [7]. Also, it is usually very difficult to characterise and repeat intervention programmes with promising effects. These constrain evidence synthesis, further development of previous programmes and translation of research into practice. One driver behind those challenges has been ***inconsistent, imprecise or inadequate reporting of intervention content by researchers.*** The taxonomy of behaviour change techniques [8] was developed to optimise the reporting and scientific study of behaviour change interventions by identifying and defining 40 existing behavioural change techniques. ***Applying and/or testing the taxonomy in designing, describing and reporting behavioural interventions should be encouraged more widely, not only by research leaders but also funders of health behavioural intervention studies as well as journals.*** Furthermore, since the taxonomy was developed primarily by English-speaking scholars, it might be useful to hear user feedback from non-English-speaking countries to inform the potential development of widely applicable versions of the taxonomy in various languages.

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