Preventing obesity among adolescent boys: the Fitness Improvement Lifestyle Awareness (the FILA program) randomised controlled trial

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Preventing obesity among adolescent boys: The Fitness Improvement Lifestyle Awareness (The FILA Program) Randomised Controlled Trial

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

from

The University of Wollongong

by

Louisa Rosemary Peralta
BEd(Hons), MEdL

Faculty of Education
2009
DECLARATION

I, Louisa Peralta, declare that this thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Signed:

Date:

20th April, 2010.
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ABSTRACT

In Australia, the prevalence of overweight and obesity has doubled among young people from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s. Unfortunately, these rates have continued to increase, with recent data showing prevalence rates for obesity trebling from the 1985. Particularly pertinent for this study is the fact that in the state of New South Wales, adolescent boys aged 12 to 15 years have shown the greatest increase over this time period, compared with girls and younger boys.

The increasing prevalence of adolescent overweight has been driven by key dietary, physical activity and sedentary behaviours. Using an Ecological Systems Model, these key behaviours are influenced by a range of individuals factors, as well as the settings in which adolescents spend most of their time (e.g. home and school), and the people with whom adolescents associate (e.g. family and peers). To prevent adolescent overweight and obesity, it is imperative that these factors are targeted in the development of obesity prevention interventions. To date, one of the most opportune settings for these interventions has been schools, with significant improvements reported in many outcomes, including body mass index (BMI). Despite this, there has been a dearth of evidence guided school-based obesity prevention interventions that target adolescent boys.

This thesis reports on two studies that were part of The Fitness Improvement Lifestyle Awareness (FILA) Program. These were a Proof-of-Concept trial (POC trial) followed by a Pilot Randomised Controlled Trial (Pilot RCT). The aim of both studies was to assess the feasibility (screening, recruitment and retention of participants, and collection of useable measurement data), acceptability (implementation of sessions, participant attendance and enjoyment of sessions, and the promotion of the program among key staff and parents) and the potentially efficacy of a multifaceted secondary school-based obesity prevention program (The FILA Program). In both trials, The FILA Program was designed to prevent unhealthy weight gain, improve cardiorespiratory fitness, promote participation in habitual moderate to vigorous physical activity, reduce time spent in small screen recreation, increase fruit consumption and reduce sweetened beverage consumption among 12 to 13 year old boys. Social Cognitive Theory was the conceptual framework underpinning the design of both trials.
The POC trial assessed the feasibility, acceptability and potential efficacy of The FILA Program among a single group of 16 Year 7 boys (mean age = 12.5 ± 0.3 years). Measurements were collected at baseline and follow-up (6 months), with the primary outcome being BMI, and waist circumference, percentage body fat, cardiorespiratory fitness, objectively measured physical activity and time spent in small screen recreation as secondary outcomes. Results confirmed that the POC trial was feasible (appropriate screening procedures), acceptable (implementation of The FILA Program; participant attendance and enjoyment of sessions; and staff satisfaction) and potentially efficacious.

With a larger sample and a comparison group, the Pilot RCT endeavoured to more thoroughly test the potential efficacy of The FILA Program. The Pilot RCT was a 16 week, 2-arm parallel group trial, in which 33 Year 7 boys (mean age = 12.5 ± 0.4 years) participated. The boys were randomly assigned to an intervention (n = 16) or active comparison group (n = 17). The intervention consisted of one 60 minute curriculum session and two 20 minute lunchtime sessions per week, for 19 weeks. The active comparison group participated in a weekly 60 minute curriculum session. The primary outcome was BMI, with additional measurements of sweetened beverage and fruit consumption included as secondary outcomes. The timing of these measurements were the same as the POC trial (baseline and 6 month follow up).

The Pilot RCT verified that The FILA Program was feasible, acceptable and potentially efficacious. Goals for screening and recruitment procedures, retention of participants, collection of useable data, implementation of and participant attendance at sessions and participant and staff satisfaction were attained. Potential efficacy findings reported a small to medium effect size for waist circumference, percentage body fat, cardiorespiratory fitness, weekday physical activity, time spent in small screen recreation on weekends and fruit consumption. These changes occurred with no adverse effect on participants’ physical, emotional and psychosocial functioning. Only small effect sizes were found for BMI, weekend physical activity, time spent in small screen recreation on weekdays and sweetened beverage consumption suggesting that The FILA Program was not as beneficial in modifying these outcomes.

The study’s findings reinforce the potential that schools have in reducing the prevalence of adolescent overweight and obesity. Future implementations of The FILA Program
will need to be tested in larger efficacy studies that are powered to detect statistically significant changes in outcomes, and enhance the understanding of Social Cognitive Theoretical constructs, by testing single or selected components.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1…………………………………..INTRODUCTION…………………………………..1

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY .................................... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES ........ ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

1.2.1 Research Question One and Hypotheses .............. Error! Bookmark not defined.

1.2.2 Research Question Two and Hypotheses .............. Error! Bookmark not defined.

1.2.3 Research Question Three and Hypotheses ............ Error! Bookmark not defined.

1.3 OVERVIEW OF METHODOLOGIES USED IN THE STUDY ......ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY ........................... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

1.5 DELIMITATIONS ................................................ ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

1.6 LIMITATIONS......................................................... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

1.7 DEFINITION OF TERMS ........................................ ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

1.8 OVERVIEW OF THESIS ........................................ ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

2……………………………...LITERATURE REVIEW…………………...ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

2.1 PREVALENCE OF ADOLESCENT OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY..... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

2.2 THE HEALTH CONSEQUENCES OF ADOLESCENT OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

2.2.1 Immediate Health Consequences of Adolescent Overweight and Obesity......Error! Bookmark not defined.

2.2.2 Long term Consequences of Adolescent Overweight and Obesity Error! Bookmark not defined.

2.3 FACTORS INFLUENCING ADOLESCENT OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY .............ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

2.3.1 Risk Factor One ...............................................Error! Bookmark not defined.

2.3.1.1 Microsystem Influences (Individual Characteristics)...Error! Bookmark not defined.

2.3.1.2 Mesosystem Influences (Familial and Peer Characteristics).............. Error! Bookmark not defined.

2.3.1.3 Mesosystem Influences (School Characteristics).............Error! Bookmark not defined.

2.3.2 Risk Factor Two ...............................................Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.2 PROOF-OF-CONCEPT (POC) TRIAL DESIGN

4.2.1 Aim

4.2.2 Screening

4.2.3 Recruitment and Consent

4.2.4 Sample Size

4.2.5 Timeline for Intervention and Comparison Groups

4.3 PROOF-OF-CONCEPT TRIAL DELIVERY

4.3.1 Afternoon Curricular Sessions

4.3.1.1 Theoretical Components

4.3.1.2 Practical Components

4.3.2 Lunchtime Sessions

4.3.3 Parent Newsletters

4.4 PROOF-OF-CONCEPT TRIAL OUTCOME MEASUREMENTS

4.4.1 BMI

4.4.2 Anthropometric Measures

4.4.2.1 Waist Circumference

4.4.2.2 Body Composition

4.4.3 Cardiorespiratory Fitness

4.4.4 Objectively Measured Physical Activity

4.4.5 Questionnaires

4.4.5.1 Health-Related Quality Of Life

4.4.5.2 Participation in Small Screen Recreation

4.4.5.3 Healthy Eating

4.4.6 Process Measures

4.4.6.1 Attendance

4.4.6.2 Researcher Evaluations

4.4.6.3 Participant Evaluations

4.4.6.4 Staff Evaluation

4.4.6.5 Parent Evaluation

4.5 PROOF-OF-CONCEPT TRIAL DATA ANALYSES

4.5.1 Data Handling and Management

4.5.2 Paired Sample T-Tests

4.6 SUMMARY

5 RESULTS (PROOF-OF-CONCEPT TRIAL)

ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
5.1 PARTICIPANTS ....................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
5.2 THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS ............................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
5.3 IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERVENTION AND PROCESS OUTCOMES ................. Error! Bookmark not defined.

5.3.1 Feasibility ............................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
5.3.1.1 Screening and Recruitment ............................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
5.3.1.2 Baseline Characteristics ..................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
5.3.1.3 Retention .............................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
5.3.1.4 Data Collection ....................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
5.3.1.5 Process Measures Related to Feasibility ...... Error! Bookmark not defined.
5.3.2 Acceptability ......................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
5.3.2.1 Implementation of Sessions and Participant Attendance .... Error! Bookmark not defined.
5.3.2.2 Enjoyment of Sessions ........................................ Error! Bookmark not defined.
5.3.2.3 Stakeholders’ Perception and Acceptance .... Error! Bookmark not defined.
5.3.2.4 Parent Involvement .............................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.

5.4 PHYSICAL AND BEHAVIOURAL OUTCOMES .... Error! Bookmark not defined.
5.4.1 Potential Efficacy ..................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
5.4.1.1 Primary Outcome ............................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
5.4.1.2 Secondary Outcomes ............................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.

5.5 SUMMARY OF RESULTS ............................................ Error! Bookmark not defined.

6 METHODOLOGY (PILOT RCT). Error! Bookmark not defined.
6.2 PILOT RCT DESIGN .................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
6.2.1 Aim ................................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
6.2.2 Screening .............................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
6.2.2.1 Pilot RCT Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria .. Error! Bookmark not defined.
6.2.3 Recruitment and Consent ....................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
6.2.4 Randomisation ........................................................ Error! Bookmark not defined.
6.2.5 Timeline for Intervention and Comparison Groups . Error! Bookmark not defined.
6.3 PILOT RCT DELIVERY ............................................ Error! Bookmark not defined.
6.3.1 Pilot RCT Intervention Group .................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
6.3.1.1 Afternoon Curricular Sessions ............................ Error! Bookmark not defined.
6.3.1.2 Theoretical Components ..................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
6.3.1.3 Practical Component .......................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
8.1 RESEARCH QUESTION ONE AND HYPOTHESES...ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

8.1.1 Hypothesis One .......................................................ERROR! Bookmark not defined.
8.1.1.1 Key Findings ....................................................ERROR! Bookmark not defined.
8.1.1.2 Comparison with Other Studies..............................ERROR! Bookmark not defined.
8.1.1.3 Possible Mechanisms and Explanations ......ERROR! Bookmark not defined.

8.1.2 Hypothesis Two .......................................................ERROR! Bookmark not defined.
8.1.2.1 Key Findings ....................................................ERROR! Bookmark not defined.
8.1.2.2 Comparison with Other Studies..............................ERROR! Bookmark not defined.
8.1.2.3 Possible Mechanisms and Explanations ......ERROR! Bookmark not defined.

8.1.3 Hypothesis Three .....................................................ERROR! Bookmark not defined.
8.1.3.1 Key Findings ....................................................ERROR! Bookmark not defined.
8.1.3.2 Comparison with Other Studies..............................ERROR! Bookmark not defined.
8.1.3.3 Possible Mechanisms and Explanations ......ERROR! Bookmark not defined.

8.1.4 Feasibility Limitations .............................................ERROR! Bookmark not defined.
8.1.5 Feasibility Recommendations ....................................ERROR! Bookmark not defined.

8.2 RESEARCH QUESTION TWO AND HYPOTHESES ....ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

8.2.1 Hypothesis Four ......................................................ERROR! Bookmark not defined.
8.2.1.1 Key Findings ....................................................ERROR! Bookmark not defined.
8.2.1.2 Comparison with Other Studies..............................ERROR! Bookmark not defined.
8.2.1.3 Possible Mechanisms and Explanations ......ERROR! Bookmark not defined.

8.2.2 Hypothesis Five .......................................................ERROR! Bookmark not defined.
8.2.2.1 Key Findings ....................................................ERROR! Bookmark not defined.
8.2.2.2 Comparison with Other Studies..............................ERROR! Bookmark not defined.
8.2.2.3 Possible Mechanisms and Explanations ......ERROR! Bookmark not defined.

8.2.3 Hypothesis Six ........................................................ERROR! Bookmark not defined.
8.2.3.1 Key Findings ....................................................ERROR! Bookmark not defined.
8.2.3.2 Comparison with Other Studies..............................ERROR! Bookmark not defined.
8.2.3.3 Possible Mechanisms and Explanations ......ERROR! Bookmark not defined.

8.2.4 Hypothesis Seven .....................................................ERROR! Bookmark not defined.
8.2.4.1 Key Findings ....................................................ERROR! Bookmark not defined.
8.2.4.2 Comparison with Other Studies..............................ERROR! Bookmark not defined.
8.2.4.3 Possible Mechanisms and Explanations ......ERROR! Bookmark not defined.

8.2.5 Acceptability Limitations..........................................ERROR! Bookmark not defined.
8.2.6 Acceptability Recommendations .................................ERROR! Bookmark not defined.

8.3 RESEARCH QUESTION THREE AND HYPOTHESES ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

8.3.1 Hypothesis Eight ......................................................ERROR! Bookmark not defined.
8.3.1.1 Key Findings .................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
8.3.1.2 Comparison with Other Studies......................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
8.3.1.3 Possible Mechanisms and Explanations .............. Error! Bookmark not defined.

8.3.2 Hypothesis Nine .................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
8.3.2.1 Key Findings .................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
8.3.2.2 Comparison with Other Studies......................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
8.3.2.3 Possible Mechanisms and Explanations .............. Error! Bookmark not defined.

8.3.3 Hypothesis Ten .................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
8.3.3.1 Key Findings .................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
8.3.3.2 Comparison with Other Studies......................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
8.3.3.3 Possible Mechanisms and Explanations .............. Error! Bookmark not defined.

8.3.4 Hypothesis Eleven .............................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
8.3.4.1 Key Findings .................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
8.3.4.2 Comparison with Other Studies......................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
8.3.4.3 Possible Mechanisms and Explanations .............. Error! Bookmark not defined.

8.3.5 Hypotheses Twelve and Thirteen ......................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
8.3.5.1 Key Findings .................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
8.3.5.2 Comparison with Other Studies......................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
8.3.5.3 Possible Mechanisms and Explanations .............. Error! Bookmark not defined.

8.3.6 Potential Efficacy Limitations .......................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
8.3.7 Potential Efficacy Recommendations .................. Error! Bookmark not defined.

8.4 Study Strengths .................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
8.5 Sources of Bias .................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
8.6 Study Generalisability ....................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
8.7 Summary, Recommendations and Conclusion ........ Error! Bookmark not defined.

8.7.1 Summary ......................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
8.7.2 Recommendations ............................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
8.7.3 Conclusion ....................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.

BIBLIOGRAPHY .................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.

APPENDIX 1 .................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.

UOW HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVALS (HE06/011) .... Error! Bookmark not defined.

APPENDIX 2 .................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
HEALTH-RELATED QUALITY OF LIFE QUESTIONNAIRE ....ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

APPENDIX 3 .................................................... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

ADOLESCENT SEDENTARY ACTIVITIES QUESTIONNAIRE (ASAQ) ............ ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

APPENDIX 4 .................................................... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

FOOD FREQUENCY QUESTIONNAIRES (POC TRIAL AND PILOT RCT) .......... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

APPENDIX 5 .................................................... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

PARTICIPANT SESSION EVALUATIONS (POC TRIAL AND PILOT RCT) ........ ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

APPENDIX 6 .................................................... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

PARTICIPANT FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS (POC TRIAL) ..... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

APPENDIX 7 .................................................... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

STAFF EVALUATIONS (POC TRIAL) ......................... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

APPENDIX 8 .................................................... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

PARENT EVALUATION (POC TRIAL) ......................... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

APPENDIX 9 .................................................... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (PILOT RCT) .......... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

APPENDIX 10 ................................................... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

NEWSLETTER ADVERTISEMENT (PILOT RCT) .... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

APPENDIX 11 ................................................... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

PILOT RCT SESSION PLAN AND SCT ALIGNMENT ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

APPENDIX 12 ................................................... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

PARTICIPANT EMAILS (PILOT RCT) ......................... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

APPENDIX 13 ................................................... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

PEER FACILITATOR CONTRACT (PILOT RCT) ...... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
APPENDIX 14 .................................................. ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

PARENT NEWSLETTER (PILOT RCT) ......................... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

APPENDIX 15 .................................................. ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

PARTICIPANT FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS (PILOT RCT) ...... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

APPENDIX 16 .................................................. ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

STAFF EVALUATION (PILOT RCT) .............................. ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

APPENDIX 17 .................................................. ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

PARENT EVALUATION (PILOT RCT) .............................. ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

APPENDIX 18 .................................................. ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

PEER FACILITATOR EVALUATION (PILOT RCT) ........ ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

APPENDIX 19 .................................................. ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

FEEDBACK TO PARENTS (PILOT RCT) ........................ ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

APPENDIX 20 .................................................. ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

COMPARISON GROUP FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS (PILOT RCT) ...................... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

APPENDIX 21 .................................................. ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

PEER REVIEWED JOURNAL ARTICLE .......................... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
**LIST OF FIGURES**

**Figure 2-1** An Ecological Systems Model for the aetiology of adolescent overweight (adapted from Davison & Birch, 2001). .......................... Error! Bookmark not defined.

**Figure 3-1** Reciprocal interactions between factors of the Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) .............................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.

**Figure 4-1** Timeline for the Proof-of-Concept Trial ...... Error! Bookmark not defined.

**Figure 5-1** Participant flow for the Proof-of-Concept Trial....... Error! Bookmark not defined.

**Figure 6-1** Timeline for the Pilot Randomised Controlled Trial... Error! Bookmark not defined.

**Figure 6-2** Baseline weekday number of minutes needed to correlate to a complete day (average counts/d). .......................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.

**Figure 6-3** Follow up weekday number of minutes needed to correlate to a complete day (average counts/d). .................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.

**Figure 6-4** Baseline weekend day number of minutes needed to correlate to a complete day (average counts/d). .............................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.

**Figure 6-5** Follow up weekend day number of minutes needed to correlate to a complete day (average counts/d). .............................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.

**Figure 7-1** Participant flow for the Pilot Randomised Controlled Trial ............... Error! Bookmark not defined.
LIST OF TABLES

Table 2-1 Summary of Studies Reporting the Prevalence of Overweight, Obesity and Overweight/Obesity Combined in Australian Children and Adolescents

Table 2-2 Descriptive Characteristics of School-Based Intervention Studies Examining Change in BMI Following an Obesity Prevention and/or Physical Activity Intervention Among Older Children and Adolescents

Table 2-3 Characteristics of Adolescent School-Based Interventions with BMI as the Primary Outcome

Table 4-1 Outline of the Proof-of-Concept Trial’s Curricular and Non Curricular Sessions

Table 5-1 Useable Data Collected at Baseline and Follow up

Table 5-2 Proof-of-Concept Trial Session Attendance Rates

Table 5-3 Participant Enjoyment Scores for each Proof-of-Concept Trial Session

Table 5-4 Primary and Secondary Outcome Measurements for the Proof-of-Concept Trial at Baseline and Follow up

Table 5-5 Summary of Results from Proof-of-Concept Trial

Table 6-1 Outline of the Pilot Randomised Controlled Trial Intervention Group’s Sessions

Table 6-2 Outline of the Pilot Randomised Controlled Trial Active Comparison Group’s Sessions

Table 7-1 Baseline Characteristics of Participants Randomised to the Intervention or Active Comparison Group
Table 7-2 Useable Data Collected at Baseline and Follow up

Table 7-3 Pilot Randomised Controlled Trial Session Attendance Rates (Intervention)

Table 7-4 Participant Enjoyment Scores for each Pilot Randomised Controlled Trial Session

Table 7-5 Changes in Primary and Secondary Outcome Measures Following Implementation of Pilot Randomised Controlled Trial

Table 7-6 Changes in Weekday Physical Activity for Pilot Randomised Controlled Trial Participants (Composite Data Analyses)

Table 7-7 Changes in Weekend Day Physical Activity for Pilot Randomised Controlled Trial Participants (Composite Data Analyses)

Table 7-8 Changes in Physical Activity for Pilot Randomised Controlled Trial Participants (Original Data Analyses)

Table 7-9 Summary of Results from the Pilot Randomised Controlled Trial

Table 8-1 Changes from Proof-of-Concept Trial to Pilot Randomised Controlled Trial after Social Cognitive Theory Mapping

Table 8-2 Baseline, Follow up, Intervention and Comparison Group Changes in Health-Related Quality of Life Measures