Author's response to reviews

Title: Intracluster correlation coefficients in cluster randomised trials: how should they be reported?

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PDF covering letter
Dear Editor

Manuscript ID 7845203929211768: Intracluster correlation coefficients in cluster randomised trials: empirical insights into how should they be reported

We thank the referees for their helpful comments on the above manuscript. We respond to each comment in turn as follows:

Comment 1 – John Ioannidis

Major point 1: The referee requests information on how frequently the ICC is reported in the cited reviews (ie refs 8-10). This has now been included in the text of the manuscript.

Major point 2: The referee questions whether there is evidence that the reporting of ICCs would appear to be increasing. We have included references to the publication of some recent collections of ICCs.

Major point 3: The referee requests more detail on the composition of the survey sample especially with regard to the split per country and the number of publications that each survey member had authored. The split per country (which was collected at the time of the survey) has now been included in the text of the manuscript. Whilst the breakdown of publications would be interesting to review, we did not collect this information in the original survey and unfortunately we do not have the resources now to undertake this task retrospectively.

Minor point 1: The first sentence has been amended as the referee suggests.

Minor point 2: The researcher who coded the responses (ie MKC) has been explicitly identified in the text.

Minor point 3: The three areas were conceptualised a posteriori – this has been clarified in the text.

Minor point 4: A sentence has been added to the discussion section indicating that the addition of detailed information on the dataset may impact on the length of the trial report, but with the advent of web-based supplementation of journal articles this should not pose undue extra burden on either the authors or the journal editors.

Minor point 5: An explanatory sentence has been added explaining how features of an intervention might affect the estimate of an ICC.

Minor point 6: The reasons why adjustments generally lead to smaller ICCs has been explained and an appropriate reference included.

Minor point 7: We accept that the term ‘majority of authors’ was confusing. We have amended the sentence to indicate that in many trials ICCs are reported solely as point estimates.

Minor point 8: A further example of helpful reporting of ICCs (including information on the dataset and other factors of interest) has been included.

Minor point 9: Typographical errors have been corrected.

Discretionary point 1: A short explanation of how ICCs can be used for sample size calculations has now been included in the text of the manuscript, and an appropriate reference cited.

Discretionary point 2: A sentence has been added explaining why some software packages give different results and an appropriate reference cited.
Comment 2 – Tim Peters

*Minor point 1:* The title has been revised to convey the more exploratory nature of the results. The style of references have also been made consistent as per the ‘instructions to authors’.

*Discretionary revisions:* Suggested minor style changes have been incorporated into the text.

Comment 3 – Michael Campbell

*Minor point* – the point that there may be more than one ICC had been added to the text.

We trust that this provides a satisfactory response to the referee’s comments. As requested, we have also the formatting of the manuscript and the reference style.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

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