Reviewer's report

Title: The effects of an intervention program for promoting interorganizational network building between multidisciplinary agencies and community-based organizations: a cluster trial in Japan

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Reviewer: Upali W. Jayasinghe

Reviewer's report:

This is an article describing a research carried out on a sample of 158 staff members and 47 CCSC. In the study, the authors’ choice of GEE models is appropriate, because staff are clustered within CCSC and GEE models account for the correlated data structure. Unfortunately, GEE models do not give estimates of variance components such as ICC and variance between and within CCSC. However, results from GEE models presented in the paper seem correct.

This is an interesting article with some important findings. However, there are some issues that the authors should address.

Major Compulsory Revisions

Page 12, top: the subscale of “Knowledge and Skills”.

They have summed nine items to get a composite score. How do authors know nine items load into a single factor without doing factor analysis? It is not clear how they deal with missing values before summing the items.

Page 13 and elsewhere: It is important to know how authors define outcome and independent variables. For example, what is intervention variable? Is it 1 for intervention and 0 for control?

On a note to Table 1 Authors indicate “Chi-square test was used for type of profession, and GEE were used for other variables” It is not clear why Chi-square test was used only for type of profession as Education level and Working hours/week are also categorical variables like profession.

In Figures 2 & 3: It is not clear P-values given is for what comparisons i.e. whether they are for interaction effect or comparison of post-intervention scores between groups. Also figures do not show the titles of y-axis.

Minor Essential Revisions

Page 16, at the end of the result section: Authors say a significant difference was found.

Authors should indicate the direction of scores (significantly higher scores or lower scores).

In Table 2: Outcome variable “Recognition of importance of building networks with CBOs” has a ceiling effect. Ceiling effect may lead to the mistaken conclusion that groups have no effect.
Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

'I declare that I have no competing interests'