Reviewer's report

Title: The acceptability, feasibility and impact of a lay counsellor delivered Health Promoting Schools intervention in India: a mixed methods evaluation

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Reviewer: Dean Whitehead

Reviewer's report:

Many thanks for the opportunity to review this interesting manuscript. I would personally like to see such content in press - but have real reservations, particularly methodological ones, that would need to be addressed. These being:

Major compulsory revision. This article is methodologically confused. It reports itself as an uncontrolled mixed methods study (not that any mixed methods study can be controlled or experimental in its entirety) - yet only reports qualitative findings. However, the qualitative findings then seem to be forced to be of a 'quantitative' nature - in essence contradicting the intention of qualitative paradigms. There are several things that do this; one - the random sampling techniques where non-random techniques are used for qual; the number of participants (small in qual for rich data); the fact that the collected data was processed (they say synthesised - which is also not qual) using SPSS (not NUDIST or NVIVO); table's 3 and 4 report frequencies.

The qualitative findings from such a large number of interviews would provide an over-whelming amount of non-rich data - and only a very small proportion of that is reported here. It could not be said to be a rich representation of the overall. No participants are mentioned / anonymised. It could be the same person saying everything. Furthermore - there are no categories or themes identified - apart from 'impact' - which is not really a theme. Reporting of the coding process and categories, themes and core categories is an essential and fundamental part of qualitative research. In the impact section - I question issues too of 'what's visual screening for colour blindness got to do with counselling?'

So - while I like the sound of this project and what it achieved overall - as well as the cultural interest factor - it has to 'decide what it is'. If it is to be a qualitative article it has to address all the above aspects - and identify what framework was used; is it descriptive exploratory, phenomenological etc?. If it's to be a mixed-methods study then it has to report all the methods and results used - both quant and qual. It probably is more recoverable though reported as a purely quantitative study - seeing as so much of it contradicts a qualitative approach

I trust that these comments assist

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests
Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
'I declare that I have no competing interests'