Reviewer's report

Title: Moving from rhetoric to reality: Adapting Housing First for homeless individuals with mental illness from ethno-racial groups

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Reviewer: Rich Janzen

Reviewer's report:

This article addresses a topic of interest and importance in the mental health field. In bringing together two theoretical orientations (i.e., housing first and anti-racism) the article provides a demonstration of the innovation that is needed in mental health practice within urban centres experiencing growing ethno-racial diversity. The article has a clear, succinct writing style, with a good understanding of relevant literature. The findings reported hold promise in contributing to the broader knowledge base within the mental health field. Despite these strengths, there are three major compulsory revisions that I suggest before decision on publication can be reached. One additional comment is given (a discretionary revision).

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Clarify focus: The focus of the article was not always clear. The scope of the research is fuzzy as the authors do not consistently distinguish between the HF ER-ICM program and the broader randomized trial study. For example, the authors include a "treatment as usual" (control) focus group as a data source for this article, however findings of this group are not later reported. Also, no explanation is given as to why a demographic comparison between HF ER-ICM treatment and control participants is necessary for the purpose of this article. Perhaps most significant was that the dual article objectives of 1) describing the program (and its participants), and then 2) evaluating this program (via "implementation" and "fidelity" evaluations) seem unnecessarily divided. The article could perhaps be better re-framed as an implementation evaluation that uses a program theory approach (with participant description and fidelity as components of implementation among others). If this is in fact the intention, the program theory would need to be strengthened. For example, the activities listed in the Table 1 Logic Model read more as guiding principles than concrete sets of program activities that are typically included in descriptors of program theory that guide evaluative inquiry (see Chen 2005; McLaughlin & Jordan 2004).

2. Strengthen description of research design/methods: The description of the study design and methods are under-developed. To begin, there is no articulation of the the main research questions being explored (i.e., the specific aspects of program implementation being considered and how they relate to the program theory). In addition, there is no clear methods section that describe the methods (some methods are briefly described under the analysis sub-section), the
rationale of their use in answering main research questions, the specific tools used to gather data, and how these tools were implemented. Furthermore, no sampling criteria nor recruitment procedures are provided for the qualitative methods. Finally, no information is provided as to how the qualitative data was analyzed and the steps undertaken to ensure trustworthiness of analysis.

3. Enhance results section: The lack of clear research questions seems to have brought a lack of focus to the results section. This is most clearly seen in the sub-section reporting on the implementation evaluation. Here fidelity is seen as a sub-set of implementation, unlike in the stated article objectives where it is separated out. In addition, the consumer and service provider feedback sub-section primarily presents facilitators of implementation (save for a few paragraphs describing participant satisfaction). This sub-section is then immediately followed by a sub-section which again describes facilitators of implementation. Qualitative themes reported according to main research questions (and that highlight stakeholder similarities and differences) could be a stronger framework for reporting on findings.

Discretionary Revision

1. While command of the academic literature is a clear strength of this article, there is one area that the authors may wish to enhance. The author's state that effective multicultural mental health strategies remain elusive. As evidence of the need to address this gap they offer a citation. While the work cited is indeed a landmark Canadian report ("After the door has been opened"), much more recent examples could also be given. (Incidentally, the 1998 date that they provide for the citation should in fact read 1988.) In addition, some innovative examples of addressing this gap are also beginning to emerge, including in the Toronto and surrounding areas (which I believe are known to at least some authors). Some of these examples could be briefly acknowledged, with explanation as to how the HF ER-ICM is similar or different in nature and scope. I would be happy to share citations if the authors wish.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**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.