Reviewer’s report

Title: Modular health services: A single case study approach to the application of modularity to residential mental healthcare

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Reviewer: Anke Bramesfeld

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Review: Modular health services: A single case study approach to the application of modularity to residential mental healthcare

This study explores the applicability of the modularity concept, derived from Operations Management to residential mental health care. Therefore one residential mental health services (assisted living facility, ALF), serving 90 clients is studied as an example. The study is innovative, particular in its research design that combines qualitative interviews with observational analysis.

The background for the study is the target of Dutch mental health policy to shut down one third of residential care beds by 2020. Therefore ALFs should aim at supporting their clients to become self-supporting, e.g. independent. This should result in them needing fewer services. This target seems to require a change in ALFs service provision habits. That the target of ALf service has not been the empowerment and making independent of their clients, is an issue remarkable in itself at this point!

The idea lying behind this study, that applying the modularity concept to the Alf would help them to improve their services towards the goal of making clients self-supporting, isn’t really made clear in the article. It has to be deducted from many hints by the reader. Therefore I read the article for a long time, wondering what it is getting at.

In detail I would like to make the following remarks

Background:

As stated above, the background should make clearer why the modularity concept should be applied to ALFs, what would be the expected benefit.

The theoretical background is far too long and extensive. Information that is relevant for this study such as definitions of the different sorts of interfaces and what they mean get lost in the wealth of information. They should be more clearly be worked out and this chapter limited to the information that is absolutely necessary to understand the study.

Please do not use abbreviations that are not explained: IMPACT

It should be made clearer when talking about mental health beds, residential long-term care is meant, not acute mental health care.
Methods:
The method is well and understandably explained and justified.

Results
I find the results difficult to follow; they are presented on a very abstract level, which is derived from the modular concept. Also the tables do not really help at this point. Tables should be able to stand for its own and be self-explanatory. The results are not really linked to the research question. Neither did a clear picture arise what services the ALF provide, nor where its potentials for improvement would be.

Discussion
The discussion is through full. However, it should once more refer to the question, what the modularity concept would be good for. Rather than implications for research I would be interested in implications for practice. Further it should be discussed whether the modularity concept has revealed to be useful for supporting ALF services in reshaping their service provision, so that they succeed in making clients ready for discharge. After reading the study, I doubt that the modularity concept would be a first line choice for this target.

In general:
Language-wise it is a very well written article. Publications on residential care are scarce and this is in itself a contribution of this research. In general I think this research would be feasible for publishing, if the authors would succeed in making clear what this research is good for and outline its practical implication (this could also be: the concept is not useful for the changes that ALF services are facing) give this a more prominent role in the presentation of the research.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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'