Reviewer’s report

Title: Developing a CONSORT Extension for Interventions in Criminology, Education, Psychology, Public Health, and Social Work

Version: 1 Date: 18 February 2013

Reviewer: Lutz Goldbeck

Reviewer’s report:

CONSORT guidelines have had a major impact on clinical researchers, authors, editors, policy makers during the past 15 years. However, the implementation of the CONSORT guidelines in research reports on psychosocial and educational intervention studies has been limited, even considering the already available extensions (e.g., for non-pharmacological trials, for quality of life outcomes). This might be due to the fact that the point of origin for CONSORT was the randomized placebo-controlled drug trial. Translation of CONSORT to non-pharmacological interventions has to regard their more complex characteristics. E.g., the mode of delivery and implementation of an intervention under study has to be planned and described more detailed for psychosocial interventions, which is not necessary for a drug or placebo pill due to existing quality standards, as assured by pharmacists or drug companies.

The authors announce a project to develop extended reporting guidelines for non-medical interventions. They describe the rationale and the proposed methods and send out a call for participation in a Delphi panel to stakeholders in the field of non-pharmacological interventions. The project is highly useful, as the CONSORT consortium is experienced and well respected and might therefore become able to influence the reporting of “UPSCALE” interventions, once a more interdisciplinary approach is warranted. Thus, the project promises to further close the gap between reporting standards for pharmacological and non-pharmacological trials.

I would suggest that the authors might clarify some aspects of the project for the reader:

Comments:

1. Introduction: How would the proposed new guideline extension relate to the already existing extension for non-pharmacological interventions? Do the authors intend to start all over again, or will the existing extension be integrated with the new one?

2. At the end of the introduction, the authors state that the RCT design would be the starting point for the new guideline extension. However, alternative designs are widely used in UPSCALE. Therefore it might be useful to consider and define also generic reporting issues of non-pharmacological intervention studies right from the start.
3. External validity: The emphasis of external validity is an important step to reach out for more acceptance of reporting guidelines. The guidelines might also consider some suggestions for authors how to justify their specific balance between internal and external validity.

4. There is a negative correlation between length and acceptance/implementation of guidelines. Existing space limits of scientific journals (especially print journals) often do not allow to report extensively on very complex methods and study designs. Once the CONSORT checklists gets more complex, this problem of appropriate description and publishing the study methods might become even more urgent. The authors might comment on this problem and indicate possible solutions.

5. Please indicate a strategy how to involve a variety of important stakeholders from other scientific communities than those in the medical field. Besides the invitation to participate in the Delphi process via the website, could e.g. scientific societies or journal editors in psychology, social work, criminology, and education be approached in a more systematic way?

**Level of interest:** An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.