Reviewer’s report

Title: Evaluation of multisystemic therapy pilot services: protocol of the Systemic Therapy for At Risk Teens (START) trial

Version: 2 Date: 4 July 2013

Reviewer: Mary McMurran

Reviewer’s report:

This is a much improved paper. I have only a few minor issues to raise that the authors could be asked to consider. Some small changes might further improve this paper.

p. 7 para 1 – the CIs for the SMD for offending do not include the actual mean reported here (-.47).

p. 10, para 3 – MAU is introduced without the acronym first being spelt out. It is spelt out later (p. 12, para 2).

p. 11, para 1 – The following sentence doesn’t make sense; the first part of the sentence relates to type of young person and the second to treatment fidelity: “Consistent with extant mediational studies of MST trials with a range of juvenile offenders [48, 50], we will test whether the MST theory of change is supported in a broader group of antisocial adolescents in the UK; namely, that therapist adherence to the MST model will result in improvement on key family and peer risk factors associated with antisocial behaviour, and that improvements in these risk factors will result in decreased adolescent antisocial behaviour.

In the ethics section on p. 12, I think Trust (or equivalent) Research Governance approvals should also be presented. The Editor should advise on whether this is needed.

p. 17, para 2 – an ‘outcome assessor’ is mentioned for the first time. What is this? I assume it’s a researcher. ‘Research assessors’ are mentioned on p. 29 para 2.

p. 18, para 1 – an ‘MST supervisor’ is mentioned for the first time. In the next paragraph we are introduced to MST ‘therapist’ and in the paragraph after that to an ‘MST worker’. Perhaps reference to where these roles are described could be added here (i.e., pp. 20-21). Are ‘therapists’ and ‘workers’ the same thing?

p. 22, para 1 – The information that ‘Medication is offered as part of the programme when necessary’ needs some clarification. As it is, it could be read that the MST therapist does this. In reality, I assume a referral to a GP for an independent assessment and decision is made. Are GPs part of the MST team?

p. 27, para 2 – the CU trait measure is mentioned under outcomes when it should probably be in the ‘Moderators’ section.
Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

No competing interests.