Reviewer’s report

Title: THE SAAF STUDY: A Randomised Trial and Implementation Evaluation of the Safeguarding Children Assessment and Analysis Framework (SAAF) compared with management as usual for improving outcomes for children and young people who have experienced maltreatment or who are at risk of maltreatment.

Version: Date: 27 August 2014

Reviewer: Kelli Allen

Reviewer’s report:

This manuscript describes the protocol for a clinical trial of the SAAF study, which evaluates a systematic approach to assessing risks in the context of child protection social services. This is an important problem to address, and the findings have strong potential for practical application. Overall the manuscript provides a good description of this pragmatic trial. I have the following recommendations for clarifying and strengthening the manuscript. I would consider these compulsory revisions, but they should all be quite feasible to address.

Abstract
1. 1st sentence under Methods / design could be simplified grammatically to make it easier for the reader to understand.
2. 3rd sentence under Methods / design – seems like there is a grammar issue, particularly whether the “;” is appropriate here.
3. The dates of recruitment are not needed in the abstract.
4. Seems like there may be a grammar issue in the sentence beginning “The primary outcome…” The sentence was a bit hard to understand. Same comment for the next sentence.

Background
1. The 1st paragraph would benefit from a clearer discussion of the Munro report, what specific “deficits” from that report are addressed in this study and how. The general idea is there, but the unfamiliar reader would benefit from a bit more description. Could also tie in this first paragraph a bit more clearly with the next one that launches into the idea of shared decision-making.
2. Grammar issue in sentence beginning “An important achievement…”
3. Spell out DfE before using abbreviation.
4. Grammar / clarity issue in sentence beginning “Both address…”

Methods
1. Please check grammar of sentences in Inclusion and Exclusion sections
2. Last sentence under Social Work Teams: consider moving this earlier in the
paragraph rather than after the discussion of teams that would not be eligible.

3. Provide information about the time frame in which outcomes will be assessed (e.g., how long after the assessment is administered).

4. Describe who will provide the post-training telephone consultancy.

5. For the quality assessments (pages 15-16), provide more description on how they will be assessed and by whom.


7. Reference is made to “section 12.” This is unclear.

8. There are some details of the methods section that, although important for an IRB, are not essential for readers of the manuscript. In particular this applies to some sections under Data management – Security and confidentiality, as well as Data Monitoring and Auditing. Recommend reviewing these sections and omitting details that are not essential for the reader of the manuscript to understand the trial.

9. Provide a more descriptive heading than “Other” (page 23).

10. In the analysis section, it would help to differentiate plans for each of the outcomes, since some are binary and some continuous.

**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.