Reviewer's report

Title: Social Networks and Implementation of Evidence-Based Practices in Public Youth-Serving Systems: A Mixed Methods Study

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Reviewer: Ivaylo Vassilev

Reviewer's report:

General comments:

The paper offers a useful reminder that interpersonal and inter-organisational relationships do matter and that the ways in which they are institutionalised within existing structures is important. While this may seem obvious, it is often not reflected in the literature on implementation and therefore the reporting and discussion of these findings is very necessary. The paper also usefully frames this discussion within insights from social network analysis. Another strong point of the paper is its competent use of a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques in the analysis of the data which should be welcomed. The objectives are clearly described and the methods are well matched to the aims of the paper. The use of social network analysis as a way of visualizing the data in particular is very useful.

Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)

1) It would be useful if the authors provided in an annex or a separate document the codebook developed for the qualitative analysis.

2) I thought that the discussion towards the end of the paper on the potential use of networks in implementation is quite interesting and would merit some further development and qualification. A minor point in relation to that is that it seems to me that the evidence presented does not warrant a strong claim that “the units of implementation are social networks that cut across agencies and counties, not the agency or county itself.” (p.17 para 2) Indeed, the paper does not offer any robust conceptualisation of networks beyond the use of network as a broad metaphor for overlapping relationships and exchanges that are embedded into existing institutional structures. And in this sense networks are not an alternative but parallel structures or quasi-structures with complementary properties, but not necessarily full alternatives. More specifically, while drawing on the presented evidence it seems to be possible to argue that existing relationships would be an important resource to draw on it is not clear from the paper, how would the boundaries of a network (as a site of implementation) be defined, and what are the implementation strategies that could be adopted. This links to a further point, about offering examples that could illustrate the latter. Actually, the authors briefly refer to this a bit further (p.17 para 3), but it would seem to me that
developing these examples and adding some further reflections about the possible difficulties that could be expected from such an approach would be of interest to the readers of the paper.

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

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

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

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.