Reviewer's report

Title: Observational Measure of Implementation Progress: The Stages of Implementation Completion (SIC)

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Reviewer: Jennifer L. Magnabosco

Reviewer's report:

1. This article has great potential to make a contribution to the implementation science literature with a measure of implementation processes and its application to community-based practices. However, in its current form, it does not provide adequate detail on background, application to evidence-based practice (e.g., what makes the SIC applicable to evidence-based practices? That is, why the emphasis on evidence-based practice versus emphasis on the measurement of any organizational practice process that is implemented?)

2. There is also a lot of discussion about other analyses in progress and possible future application of results: These parts of the article read more like a work plan description and take away from the results that are mentioned.

The following comments describe the areas in which the article needs more development and/or improvement:

Major Compulsory Revisions

Background Section.

3. While the description in this section flows, the level of detail needs to be increased for the reader to adequately understand the Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC) practice, the 8 stages of implementation and the SIC instrument. 4. Since the MTFC is not described at all, Table 2 is difficult to understand, and the merit of MTFC as an evidence-based practice cannot be assessed. Without this detail, validity of study results, and concluding statements, e.g., the SIC can be applied to other evidence-based practices, cannot be adequately evaluated.

5. Likewise, the level of detail that is provided for the SIC instrument properties, scoring, developmental process and cost-effectiveness is not adequate, as well as a full description of the 8 stages of implementation (e.g., what each stage means and how they relate to one another, more information on why date is the anchor upon which completion is based) and how stakeholders are involved. Without more description of these basic elements the value and essence of the SIC instrument and the implementation model cannot be adequately linked to results and conclusions, as currently presented.

Tables.

6. Table 1 stakeholder involvement and title, Stage by Agent, is not clear. Please
see Background comments for more details.

7. Table 2 also needs some revision, e.g., data could be eliminated in each entry and listed as part of the Activity header, as its activities do not map to Figure 1, e.g., Figure 1 shows 4 activities for Stage 1 but Stage 1 on Table 2 only shows 2 activities.

8. Figure 1, in its current form, is not clear, and also does not contain information on all 53 counties, or by experimental and control condition. A similar figure, or 2 figures (e.g., one that summarizes the counties in aggregate, and one that shows results by both conditions), that better summarizes counts for the activities within each implementation stage across rows and columns so that the reader can better understand the status within each activity. Figure 1 would also then need more detailed description in the text in the results and in the discussion sections.

Methods.

9. While this section describes the overall format for the randomization of the counties for the MTFC practice, no information is provided about how the SIC was administered. These data collection details are essential to understanding all of the methods used for the study reported.

10. The information about the MTFC is a bit confusing as some of the details do not seem to pertain to the study reported on, that is, they seem to be additional steps being taken in analyses not reported.

11. Basic information about method, such as dates the SIC was administered, number of respondents, participants and data collectors, solicitation method, settings in which the SIG was administered, etc. are needed.

Results.

12. This section is too short and does not summarize results adequately for Figure 1, and other components of the study reported throughout the text, e.g., the scoring of the SIC. The statements that are made about results in this section are not supported by the Tables and Figure provided, e.g., Figure 1 does not show all data for the 53 counties so how can the reader ascertain whether, for example, "for some of the later stages, most of the counties have censored observations as noted above"? As suggested above, creating different tables that show counts to support some of the statements in the current results section is essential, as well as additional reporting of basic results of the SIC data collection process.

Conclusions.

13. Based on all comments above, the conclusions, as is, are not supported by the background and results provided, as is.

14. The limitations as described, are a good start. However, some of the text that describes timing would be helpful in the Background and Method sections so that the SIC instrument properties can be better understood and linked to issues of evidence-based practice.
Minor Essential Revisions

15. The title could benefit from a qualifier that helps to contextualize setting or another aspect of, e.g., ...The Stages of Implementation Completion (SIC) in Community-based Settings.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**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.