Author's response to reviews

Title: Developing programme theory for purveyor programmes

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Implementation Science Editorial Team and Referees,

Thank you for taking the time to consider our manuscript, “Developing programme theory for purveyor programmes”. We have revised the manuscript based on the comments made by the referees and include detailed responses to their various concerns in this letter. We hope that you will find the manuscript ready for publication.

Referee 1:
Minor Essential Revision
- We corrected the spelling error.
Discretionary Revision
- We separated the two paragraphs and included further details regarding the process of obtaining consent from the study participants in the second paragraph that deals with ethical considerations.

Referee 2:
Major Compulsory Revision
- We changed various sections in the manuscript to ensure that it is clear that the purveyor programme and not the peer education intervention is the focus of our study. In the Abstract under the Method section it now states: “This study was designed to develop and depict the programme theory underlying the support services delivered by a South African purveyor.”
- To increase clarity we changed purveyor-type programmes to purveyor programmes and chose to refer to the peer education activities as an intervention rather than a programme. In the Background section purveyors (“individuals or organisations that operate as outside experts who promote and supports organisations, systems, and practitioners to adopt and implement interventions”), purveyor programmes (“support services delivered by purveyors”), provider organisations (organisations that “adopt interventions and employ the group of individuals, also called implementers, who deliver the intervention to the intended beneficiaries”), and implementers (the group of individuals “who deliver the intervention to the intended beneficiaries”) are now clearly defined. We use the definitions suggested by Fixsen DL, Naoom SF, Blase KA, Friedman RM, Wallace F in “Implementation research: A synthesis of the literature” as this is currently one of the most seminal documents in implementation field. We also draw on their models in our study so this decision ensures that definitions can be applied uniformly throughout the manuscript.
- We added a presentation of the development within the field of purveyors as well as an overview of general characteristics of purveyors.
- Our study serves as an example of how programme theory can be developed and also makes explicit the mechanisms of change of one particular purveyor programme. As we did not evaluate the effectiveness of the purveyor programme we feel that an attempt to make generalisations from this study is premature. Before such an attempt is made more research is needed on the relative effectiveness of different purveyor models. Developing the programme theory underlying various purveyors is the first step in this direction. We added this discussion in the Conclusion section.
Minor Essential Revision

- In the Background section under the headline programme theory we adjusted the passage and explained the statement more thoroughly. “As the Agency has been providing services for three years already when the present study started, the first cluster identified by Funnel and Rogers did not apply. The benefits we envisaged were in line with the other three clusters of theory use. It would clarify the specific mechanisms involved in the purveyor programme that results in: a shared understanding of the purveyor programme amongst stakeholders; a more effective and efficient monitoring system; and a solid basis for any future evaluation of the Agency’s work. It was argued that this process would not only encourage and increase the commitment, focus, and effectiveness of the Agency’s staff members, but would also ensure that essential components of the purveyor programme are clearly defined and remain relevant when the Agency expands their services delivery.”

- In the Methods section we expanded on how we decided who to involve in the process of constructing the programme theory of the purveyor programme. We added more references and articulate our reasoning behind the suggested approach more clearly.

- In the Background section under the headline programme theory in the last paragraph we adjusted the wording to clearly portray the primary aim of the study - to develop the programme theory of a specific purveyor programme. This process of theory development served various purposes. Firstly, it resulted in a better understanding of the purveyor programme among the Agency’s stakeholders and can subsequently be used to encourage the strength and fidelity of programme implementation of the Agency’s staff members. Secondly, we hope that this model will start to clarify how purveyors operate by serving as a detailed example of the operations of a specific purveyor. Thirdly, the study serves as an example of how programme theory could be developed and depicted.

If you have any remaining concerns do not hesitate to contact the corresponding author.

Best regards,
The authors
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