Reviewer’s report

Title: Developing programme theory for purveyor programmes

Version: 2 Date: 11 June 2012

Reviewer: Bianca Albers

Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revisions:
In the beginning of the article it was unclear to me whether the authors aimed at evaluating the program content and implementation of the specific program they had been involved in, or whether the purveyor role was in focus.

First later in the article it becomes clearer that the purveyor role is in focus. As that is the case I miss - and find it strictly necessary - a more detailed delineation of what a 'purveyor-type program' is (which to me would be a clinical intervention with its own theory of change), a purveyor (an organization supporting providers), and closely related organizations (e.g. "intermediary organization") are. I also miss a presentation of the field of purveyors and intermediary organizations within the field of human services - what type of organizations do operate in the field already, how do they do that and what does empirical research tell us about this field - I think that this information like this would strengthen the article by putting it into a more solid context that clarifies why this study is of greater interest than just for the local intervention to which it is connected. Finally I would strongly suggest a discussion of the generalizability of the results for other purveyors. Is there a more general program theory for purveyors that is applicable no matter if a purveyor operates in mental health, juvenile justice, public health, substance abuse etc.? That conversation is of great importance to the field.

Minor essential revisions:
There are two passages in the texts which made me pause. Passage 1: Under headline 'program me theory': All these aspects were relevant to the present purveyor program me, although three aspects, engaging stakeholders, developing a shared understanding of the program me, and clarifying how different pars are connected, were of particular importance.' Why is that? The authors do not explain the choice they make here. Passage 2: Under headline "methods": 'Currently, most practitioners describe the best approach for extracting and developing program theory as lying somewhere in between these two extremes.' Again I must ask: So? The authors use this claim - supported by only one literature reference - as argument for their own methodical approach, and it can easily be turned down by references to research based program theory solidly planted in empirical data. So, this way of developing a program theory may be one that has greater chances of being accepted - but it isn't necessarily the way that brings greatest evidence. I would suggest greater precision in the wording here.
In addition, it has to be made very clear from the beginning that the aim of the article is to unfold the theory of change for purveyors. Currently two purposes are mentioned: In the abstract (under headline 'Methods') the authors mention 'developing and depicting the program me theory of a purveyor-type program me'; later one it says: 'to develop better understanding of the program me among stakeholders, and to use this to encourage the strength and fidelity of implementation'.

With regard to my language assessment below: I really find the clarification of definitions important - some of the terms used in the current version are too confusing / overlapping with each other, especially the purveyor-type program and other programs.

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

**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.