Author's response to reviews

Title: Between and Within-site Variation in Qualitative Implementation Research

Authors:

Justin K Benzer (justin.benzer@va.gov)
Sarah Beehler (sarah.beehler@va.gov)
Irene E Cramer (lmchsc@gmail.com)
David C Mohr (david.mohr2@va.gov)
Martin P Charns (martin.charns@va.gov)
James F Burgess (james.burgess@va.gov)

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Thank you for your review of our paper. We have conducted a comprehensive edit of our manuscript and address each of your points below.

1. More attention needs to be given to the clear expression and content appearing in the abstract. Greater clarity about the specific reasons for undertaking the study and background, what where the type of interviews that were carried out, no mention of case study approach used, identifying and naming the novel barriers and facilitators identified in the study, what different topics sets of key informants actually identified etc.
   e.g. Variation in perspectives regarding intervention implementation may be critical to understanding why an intervention succeeds or fails WHY, but designing multi-site implementation research to address this variation can be more complex than other qualitative studies BECAUSE. The purpose of this study was to formally analyze the within-site and between-site variation in perceptions of an intervention implementation by different sets of key informants, and thereby illustrate the benefits of collecting and analyzing qualitative data from multiple perspectives during intervention implementation.

We have revised the abstract as requested. We have clarified the background section by highlighting three key conceptual points.

- A key challenge in qualitative implementation research is deciding which informants to sample
- Perceptions across professions can vary both within and between sites and there is no consensus about how to manage or analyze this variation
- This study demonstrates the potential implications of restricted sampling by showing how within site variation contributes to inferences about both within-site and between-site implementation themes.

We removed the sentences regarding why variation is critical and why addressing complexity is important from the abstract, and instead address it only in the text (see response to comment 2). We have added the requested detail to the methods and have described the implementation concepts and themes revealed in the interviews to the results section.

2. In the introduction showing the variation with reference to specific examples of the implementation of interventions should be included. This relates to the original need to ground the present study in the literature on implementation

Paragraph 3 addresses why analysis of qualitative variation is important and describes how variation among informants is particularly challenging in multi-site studies because characteristics such as profession, leadership level, and role in the intervention shape perceptions of the intervention.
3. fleshing out the way in which qualitative research is used in relation to the implementation of trials would be helpful- the range of nested qualitative studies goes beyond -the generalist description of "providing a deeper insight into the causal processes involved in the trial" could add another reference Lewin BMJ for example identifies in a qualitative review in relation to implementation the following reasons for qual research: whether the intervention was delivered as intended, including describing the intervention as delivered,"unpack" processes of implementation and change To explore deliverers' and recipients' responses to the intervention.

We agree that there are multiple roles for implementation research in RCTs. We also believe that these roles are similar for both RCT and naturalistic implementation studies, so it is appropriate to make these important connections. As a result, we have emphasized this more clearly in paragraph 2 of the introduction. Thank you for the reference, we agree that it is appropriate for this section.

4. Summarising clearly in a table the key identifying convergent and discrepant meanings across within site and between site variation in perceptions about implementation intervention.

We believe that this suggestion greatly increases the accessibility of our paper. We have created a new Table 5 to show how the qualitative data supports the within-site themes and the overall between-site theme.

5. A thorough edit for sentence construction and meaning

We carefully have reviewed the entire paper and edited it throughout to enhance clarity.