Reviewer’s report

Title: The current use of feasibility studies in the assessment of feasibility for stepped-wedge cluster randomised trials: a systematic review

Version: 0 Date: 25 Sep 2018

Reviewer: Reviewer 2

Reviewer's report:

PEER REVIEWER COMMENTS: To view the full report from the academic peer reviewer, please see the attached file.

REVIEWER COMMENTS FROM REPORT: The overall impression of the study is positive. Systematic reviews are very helpful in understanding where a field is moving in its progress, and this one was done well. The systematic review methods were used clearly, cited clearly, and applied correctly. It certainly meets best practice for systematic reviews and is a creative way to gain an understanding of the field.

REQUESTED REVISIONS:

The interpretation of the data reviewed is more complicated than the authors have identified. They reviewed the existence and content of published feasibility studies for stepped wedge cluster randomized trials. However, they did not and could not review non published feasibility studies. The conclusions should be that there are few feasibility studies published, not that there are few feasibility studies conducted. The conclusions about the lack of stepped wedge content and issues in these feasibility studies seems to be true, however.

ADDITIONAL REQUESTS/SUGGESTIONS:

The title has imbedded in it the findings and this should not be the case. The title should focus on the mission of the systematic review, not the outcome of the systematic review.

Also the definition of stepped wedge cluster design deserves another sentence to clarify exactly what is meant.

The feasibility issues at the end of the introduction are not really unique to stepped wedge cluster designs. Can the authors provide clearer issues that would be? If not, this review should be a review of feasibility studies in general.
Pilot and feasibility studies are not defined.

The authors did not cite systematic review guidelines. Were they used to conduct this systematic review?

An appendix should be provided listing study by study included, and the characteristics that are summarized in the existing table.

**Are the methods appropriate and well described?**
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Does the work include the necessary controls?**
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?**
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

No

**Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?**
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

**Quality of written English**
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

**Declaration of competing interests**
Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

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3. Do you hold or are you currently applying for any patents relating to the content of the manuscript?
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5. Do you have any other financial competing interests?

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If you can answer no to all of the above, write 'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.

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