Reviewer’s report

Title: Towards greater understanding of implementation during systematic reviews of complex healthcare interventions: the Framework for Implementation Transferability Applicability Reporting (FITAR)

Version: 0 Date: 18 Sep 2018

Reviewer: Helen Burchett

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting article, going beyond what most articles about applicability tools do because they actually work through an example of how the tool could work. I recommend it is published.

Nevertheless, I think some changes could make the paper even more useful. There are two major changes I suggest:

1. Papers such as this, where you use an example to illustrate a method, are always a challenging balance of how much detail you need to show the example and how much becomes findings from the example itself. I recommend moving the findings from point 1 on page 8 to point 7 on p17 to a table in a supplementary file and keeping the text of the findings about your reflections on how you found the data, your experience of data extraction and so on. Those wanting to see the example could then refer to the table, whilst you will be able to expand on your findings about how the tool developed, what it means or how it is used, and this will stand out more clearly.

2. I wasn’t clear how you expect the tool to be used - will it just be purely for reporting what included studies say? Who will then interpret this information - the reader? There is no information about how to use the extracted data to assess applicability/transferability, regardless of whether that is done by the reviewers or the readers. In regards to your example, what conclusions were you able draw about applicability/transferability?

And some more minor points:

- I wasn’t clear how you decided what aspects to report on - or whether you just reported whatever the included papers did? Did included papers report this information as related to applicability/transferability, or was that the reviewers’ interpretation?
- in 'patients and populations', I wasn't clear about the difference between 'levels of deprivation' and 'socio-economic diversity', or between 'level of health needs' and 'prevalence of condition'. Was 'population density' a 'geographical factor'? If so, was this your specific interpretation of what 'geographical factor' was relevant for this specific topic?

- in 'sources of funding' you refer to limited applicability to current systems in the UK. How do you know this - is that your tacit knowledge of the UK context? This is the sort of thing I would like to see more elaboration of - understanding how you (or anyone) should make these judgements.

- I wasn't clear how some criteria were relevant to applicability/transferability - you could make this explicit e.g. incentives, dedicated project manager/managerial leadership roles, managerial or clinical leadership, project champions. Aren't these just good implementation practice (excluding incentives - which are more debatable!). Also not sure how 'awareness of the initiative amongst patients and support for the initiative amongst patients is relevant to applicability/transferability - this could be articulated.

- line 297, p18, 'may not be typically reported' - in primary studies or systematic reviews? This highlights an issue you could talk more about- the poor reporting of such information in primary studies.

- lines 402-3 on p18 - this seems to be confusing effectiveness with applicability/transferability

- last paragraph on p18 - the 2nd sentence doesn't follow the first. Also, you might like to look at another recent paper (can't think who wrote it!) that made the same point: https://health-policy-systems.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12961-018-0364-3

- p19, 2nd paragraph, I completely agree about the need to demonstrate greater usability. Perhaps an area for future research?

- appendix 2 - clarify whether these are questions for systematic reviewers to ask for each included study, rather than at review level.

- A couple of typos in box 1, in point 1 (type should be types) and point 5 (services/s). A missing 'the' on line 192 on p8 ('...attention to the identification of...')
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

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