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: 1 Date: 01 Nov 2018

Reviewer: Susan L. Norris

Reviewer's report:

Major comments
1. The methods by which the 44 items in FITAR were selected is unclear. They apparently used "conventional content analysis", but no information is provided as to how they arrived at 7 main items and 44 subitems.

2. As the authors acknowledge, there is no consideration of underlying theory. I think this is more than a limitation (page 21) but rather a fatal flaw. Although termed a "framework", rather FITAR appears to be a rather exhausting (but not exhaustive) laundry list.

3. How one would use FITAR is unclear until one reads the discussion; on page 8 it states one would use it "during a SR". Early in the paper it should be clear when, why and how one might use FITAR. Is it for systematic reviewers primarily, or for end-users such as guideline developers or policy makers?

4. The 7 main questions (page 8) are of two types: #1 an #2 ask about what the findings might apply to, while #3 to #7 ask about the factors that might influence effectiveness. In the absence of an overarching conceptual framework, it is unclear why there are these two types of questions.

5. The patient factors on page 10 are very clinical; what about factors such as access to care (which might overlap with urban/rural), cultural and religious views of patients (preferences) and health literacy as a few examples. Again, the items listed seem random rather than being a thoughtful list placed within a unifying framework.

6. What are complex versus simple interventions? How did the authors categorize studies? A clear definition is needed so that the distinctions are meaningful.
7. In the discussion on page 19 is mention of factors affecting implementation and on page 19 reporting of interventions (TIDieR). It is unclear what FITAR adds to these existing models or checklists. The perspective is slightly different, but its value is unclear.

8. On a related note, the relationship of FITAR to questions the end-user might want to know is unclear. Questions include:

   a. What works in what settings?
   b. How does the intervention work? Why does it work?
   c. How does one make it work in a specific setting?

   - again, this lack of clarity relates to the absence of a conceptual framework for FITAR.


10. Annex 1 (the extraction form) has so little detail that it is of no use to the reader. Suggest deleting.

Minor comments

   1. What are admission routes (line 297)?
   2. Line 466, Atkins citation is incorrect - should be #19.

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

No

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

Unable to assess

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
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Unable to assess
Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
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