Author's response to reviews

Title: Developing a programme theory to explain how primary health care teams learn to respond to intimate partner violence: A realist case-study

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Author’s response to reviews: see over
Dear Editor and reviewers

Thank you very much for the last revisions made to our manuscript “Developing a programme theory to explain how primary health care teams learn to respond to intimate partner violence: A realist case-study”. We have incorporated the comments made by the reviewers and also responded to their queries. During this process of successive revisions we think that the paper has improved, as also one of the reviewers have pointed out.

We have highlighted in yellow the changes made in the manuscript.

Yours sincerely,

Isabel Goicolea

Corresponding author

Reviewer: Angela Taft

Reviewer's report:

I remain unconvinced about the sustainability of the model, there are few enough reasonable process evaluations with a theoretical base to guide those who wish to attempt it and the authors are extending their testing to more clinics.

As we have previously explained this is not a process evaluation but one cycle of realist evaluation. Since realist evaluation works in cycles, the end of each cycle can become the beginning of a new cycle. As we state in the manuscript the aim of this study is “to develop a programme theory that seeks to explain how, why and under which circumstances a primary health care team in Spain learned to respond to IPV”. We consider that the findings emerging from this study are relevant in themselves as well as they become the basis for other cycles of realist evaluation (that we are implementing currently).

Reviewer: Pat O'Campo

Reviewer's report:

The article is much improved and the authors are to be congratulated for being so responsive to the challenging issues raised during the review process. The article now seems to more accurately reflect (i) the actual design of the study, (ii) clarifies the methods undertaken, in particular clarifies the analytic approach, (iii) clarifies for the most part the presentation of results and what they represent, and (iv) provides good contextual information for this emerging approach of multiple case studies (the explanation at the end of the way this particular case fits with the multiple case study design is particularly useful (around line 622)).

Many thanks for the encouraging comments; in fact the process of revision has helped us both in improving the manuscript and increasing our knowledge on realist evaluation.
Discretionary revisions

A few minor points, which will further clarify the methods and results, might be considered.

1. In the abstract the authors talk about undertaking a series of case studies. However, this paper concerns a single case. I think this should be clearer, that is, that this paper is a single case amongst a series that is to be undertaken in the future. To claim that this paper is presenting results about the series is misleading.

We have changed this in the abstract. Now it reads: “We carried out a realist case study, for which we developed and tested a programme theory that seeks to explain how, why and under which circumstances a primary health care team in Spain learned to respond to IPV.”

2. The results section, both the text and modified figures, is much improved and is very strong now. The first sentence of the Results may be misleading, the authors say, "In this section, we describe the relationship between contextual factors, outcomes and mechanisms at different levels.". Yet, in their response to reviewers they helpfully clarified that what is in the results section. Specifically, the authors note:

We think that in the Results section we have to be broader and not limited to presenting the mechanisms, since the information provided here gives the reader the possibility to assess whether what we present as PT2 makes sense. However, we have modified the text to make more explicit what we consider that are mechanisms triggered by the interventions and contextual factors.

As such the first sentence of the Results might state more accurately that what is being presented are both mechanisms but also important background information that was uncovered in the data collection and analysis process.

We have changed this. Now the first sentence in the Results section (Page 14) reads: “In this section, we present both mechanisms and important background information that was uncovered in the data collection and analysis process”.

3. Because this is an emerging method, and readers may be less familiar with the approach of explanatory case study (versus descriptive) the authors may want to note on page 10 around line 224 that collection of multiple sources of data is in fact a requirement and a strength of the approach allowing one to triangulate across data sources.

We have incorporated this comment now at the end of page 10. It reads: “We collected both qualitative and quantitative data. The first author visited LV between January and March 2013 and collected qualitative data through document review, interviews and observation. Collection of multiple sources of data is a requirement and a strength of the exploratory case
studies such as the one we carried out in La Virgen since it allows to triangulate across data sources.”