Reviewer’s report

Title: An evaluation of the implementation of cascade training for suicide prevention during the ‘Choose Life’ initiative in Scotland - utilizing Normalization Process Theory.

Version: 0 Date: 17 Apr 2019

Reviewer: Olivia Kirtley

Reviewer’s report:

The manuscript reports a qualitative study of cascade (train the trainer) training for suicide prevention, specifically focusing on the STORM training package. The authors utilise Normalisation Process Theory as a framework for coding and interpreting their data (interviews from key stakeholders: training facilitators, group participants and health board managers). The study highlights the importance of engagement at multiple organisational levels, in order for such cascade training to be effective. As the paper itself points out, evaluation of interventions and training programs for suicide prevention is woefully neglected, potentially masking areas where critical improvements are required. This paper therefore has the potential to make an excellent contribution to the literature around evaluation of training programs, however, there are some issues that I think need to be addressed.

Major:

The introduction could benefit from further strengthening, as currently this does not feel sufficiently developed. Not all readers may be familiar with Normalisation Process Theory (this is my first time hearing about it), so some more substantive explanation of this within the text would be of great benefit to readers. At the moment, the paragraph on Normalisation Process Theory comes somewhat out of the blue and many of the key details are only provided in a table. As a result of this, for me, the paper currently does not give a strong rationale for why this theory is especially relevant or provides particular advantages for approaching the research questions. The research question itself could also be more clearly and accessibly explained, as it now feels somewhat jargonistic.

The introduction overall could benefit from some tightening up to improve the flow and coherence of the narrative. Also, I think that key terms used throughout the manuscript could be better explained and defined in the introduction. For example, one major focus of the manuscript is on the idea of evaluating trainers/trainees constructions of coherence regarding STORM, but this is only explicitly defined in the discussion on p18. This would be better in the introduction.

In the discussion, the authors highlight dissemination and implementation of training as "potentially wasteful" (p17, paragraph 2). Then go on to say: "Not only is there a problem with retention of trained staff in health and social care settings, in this study, a quarter of those trained as facilitators actually completed training. Our findings suggest that the complex nature of implementation within the sites may contribute to this." Whilst the authors’ findings certainly
speak to the complexity of implementing and dissemination the STORM intervention, I am not sure that conclusions of wastefulness or the role of implementation/dissemination complexity in staff retention or training completion can be drawn from the data reported in the paper.

Minor:

There are quite a few acronyms and specialist terms used throughout the manuscript, e.g. "TIDIER checklist" (p8). Please make sure these are spelled out in full where possible, at least for the first mention, and that they are adequately explained/defined.

In several places throughout the manuscript, there are sentences that are rather too long, making the writing difficult to follow, e.g. p4, paragraph 1. There are also places where words have been missed out or extra words left in (perhaps through tracked changes), e.g. "Attention should be clearly paid in the initial planning stages to the situation in which the training trainers will take place…" (p5, paragraph 1), "…cascade training needs to be more akin to a series of superimposed 'whirlpools' rather than an expectation than a one-way torrent…” (p18, paragraph 2).

Given that the authors have declared some competing interests, it would be good to highlight in the discussion that there is a need for further independent evaluations of STORM.

**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.

Yes

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

Yes

**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

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