Reviewer’s report

Title: A case of misalignment: The perspectives of local and national decision-makers on the implementation of psychological treatment by telephone in the Improving Access to Psychological Therapy service

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Reviewer: Albert Farre

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for inviting me to review this manuscript, which reports on decision-makers perspectives about barriers and facilitators to the implementation of telephone-based psychological treatment in UK mental health services. The paper focuses on an interesting topic, using a relevant theoretical approach and appropriate methods. The study seeks to address a clearly defined gap in the literature by specifically looking at the views of key decision-makers at both local and national levels. The paper is well written and the quality of the reporting is good throughout the manuscript. My only comments would be around the following issues, which the authors may want to take into consideration:

1. The authors state in the discussion (page 22, lines 457-458) that patient and professionals perspectives will be reported elsewhere. Given the important ethical implications associated with such decision, I think this needs to be clearly and appropriately justified - i.e. why are decision-makers perspectives reported separately? What are the implications in terms of enabling a proper understanding in terms of the 'normalisation' of telephone treatments, knowing that patient and professionals perspectives are available but chosen not to be reported here?

2. I would suggest revising the reporting of the methods. The way this section is currently worded suggests that moving from stage 1 to stage 2 of the data analysis process was based on analytic criteria (i.e. 'inductive' thematic analysis was performed first, and then themes were mapped against the theoretical framework and their 'fit' assessed, resulting in no themes falling outside the framework) - however, the actual analytical significance of such a perfectly good 'fit' between stages 1 and 2 was perhaps less central than the current wording suggests (and certainly to be expected) in light of the theoretically-informed approach to semi-structured interviewing adopted (page 9, lines 178-179).
3. The authors rightly acknowledge in the introduction the importance of considering "context and multiple levels of influence", some of which is addressed with their sampling strategy focusing on key local and national decision-makers. However, on a different level, the paper does not provide much contextual information to enable readers to understand the issues identified and data presented in this paper - for example, although data collection takes place (if I understand correctly) around 10 years post-implementation of the programme under study, we do not know how participants perceived the overall success (or not) in terms of engagement and buy-in both nationally and locally.

4. In addition to this, and given the lack of any local-level specific prescriptions about implementation strategies, it is also difficult to understand the findings as whole (and the significance of the various local perspectives being brought together) without some contextual knowledge about local-level implementation approaches/strategies - e.g. some considered that having a quiet space was essential (page 14-15) but we do not know if this was expressed from the local experience of having one available or from the experience of lacking one. This contextual information is key to understand if and how this contrasts with national informant views.

5. Further to the point noted above, I think it would also help if the authors could summarise (I would suggest adding a table at the beginning of the findings section) some of the key demographic data they took into consideration (as reported on page 10, line 196).

6. The references placed alongside data examples in the findings section would benefit from some form of identification relating to the service they originated from, so that readers can get a sense of the diversity of local implementations represented in the chosen examples (particularly given that a number of participants were from the same service).

7. Finally, I think the discussion does not clearly address whether and how the findings from this study address the gap identified in the introduction (page 6, lines 110-114) - particularly in terms of how barriers/facilitators from decision-makers perspectives differ, contradict or complement clinical-level barriers/facilitators identified in previous studies.
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.

Unable to assess

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

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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Not relevant to this manuscript

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Acceptable

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