Reviewer’s report

Title: The Role of the Outer Setting in Implementation: Associations between State Demographic, Fiscal, and Policy Factors and Use of Evidence-Based Treatments in Mental Healthcare

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Reviewer: Katia Noyes

Reviewer's report:

This is an excellent study to help fill the gap in knowledge regarding the interplay between state's political, fiscal, organization and structural factors and implementation of mental health interventions and programs. The authors provided an innovative approach to combining data from multiple sources including longitudinal survey data of SMHA directors from all 50 U.S. states and territories compiled by the NASMHPD Research Institute (NRI) and other publically available data. Inherently, the analysis has several limitations but the authors provided a very balanced and thoughtful discussion of these limitations and outlined steps for future research to address most of these issues.

Below I provide several additional suggestions to address some of the analytic limitations of the current study which in my mind could have important implications for the study broad impact but were not properly addressed in the discussion section.

One of the main limitations of the currently study acknowledged by the authors is the reliance on self-report of a small number of SMHA representatives. Were any characteristics of reporting officials included with the survey (e.g., political affiliations, time in the office, clinical background, role in implementation activities etc) that could be used as additional risk-adjusters in multivariable analysis? Is there any way to validate at least some of the reported data by using state MHA annual reports or other publically available information?

Another limitation of the NRI survey data that the authors brought up is that it only asked about the 6 EBTs, while the states may have much larger program portfolios. Similarly to my comment above - is there any way to control in your analysis for the total number of programs/children and adults enrolled/covered?
There are several statistical issues that the authors should include to support the strength of their analysis. The outcomes variables were operationalized as a score on the scale 0 to 10 and treated as continuous variables in the model. Have the authors conducted any sensitivity analyses around these metrics regarding normality? Which outcomes were defined as dichotomous (p.10 line 17)?

What was the total sample size for each of the multivariable regression models? With cross-sectional time series design for 50 states over 6 available years, it should be around 300. What was the model performance with such limited sample? The authors mentioned small variance (p. 10 line 20) - for each parameters? What could be concluded from that? How did the authors decide on the model specifications and specific variables to include (Table 2)?

Finally, since the study was so constrained by the availability of high quality data, it would be very beneficial to provide a set of recommendations for the NRI and other involved organizations on how they could improve data collection for tracking their performance and program implementation.

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