Reviewer’s report

Title: A qualitative assessment of factors influencing implementation and sustainability of evidence-based tobacco use treatment in Vietnam health centers

Version: 0 Date: 23 Mar 2020

Reviewer: Sarah A. Birken

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review IMPS-D-19-00669, "A qualitative assessment of factors influencing implementation effectiveness and sustainability of strategies for increasing tobacco use treatment in Vietnam health centers." The paper relates to smoking cessation, an important population health goal, and overall, the paper is quite well-written. I was enthusiastic to review a study that sought to evaluate the effectiveness of implementation strategies in improving the adherence and sustainability of an intervention. However, my enthusiasm was limited by a few key concerns, which I present in order of importance (most critical concern first):

Throughout the paper, the authors seem to confuse the focus on the intervention, which I understand to be TDT, and the strategies used to promote the implementation of the intervention, which I understand to be the 4As and 4As+R. Curran https://implementationsciencecomms.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s43058-020-00001-z offers a distinction between the thing (intervention) and stuff done to help people do the thing (strategies). This will likely be helpful to the authors in defining the thing (TDT) and the strategies (and not just describing the 4As and R but also being really clear about where TDT ends and where the strategies begin - i.e., what components TDT includes vs. what components the implementation strategies include). This last part is very important because I had trouble - particularly in the results, but also in the methods and the background - figuring out whether the authors were interested in the intervention or the strategies. Most of the text makes it sound as though the authors are interested in understanding the influence of the strategies on adherence to TDT, but there were many, many places where I wasn't so sure. Examples include the objective of the paper: "to identify factors that influenced the implementation and the potential for sustainability of this effective model (implementation strategies???) for improving adoption and implementation of TDT guidelines in Vietnam CHCs." In the methods section, the interview guide is described as being based on the CFIR, and some examples of its application suggest that interview questions related to the implementation strategies, but some suggested that interview questions related to the intervention. If, for example, the authors asked in interviews about e.g., relative priority of addressing tobacco use, then they're asking about TDT and not about implementation strategies as I think they intended to do, and thus they haven't answered their research question. This is also confusing in the results section. For example, are 'intervention materials' part of TDT or strategies of 4As? Tension for change should be about tension of implementation, not smoking cessation. Most of the results relating to sustainability were about TDT, not 4As/4As+R, which is a different research question from the one that they intended to answer, I think.
How were the adaptations done do avoid compromising what made the implementation strategies effective in HIC? In particular, the adaptations that were intended to make the strategies effective in LMIC setting sounded quite involved. I worry that these changes might render the strategies too cumbersome/time-consuming to be acceptable, for example, thus diminishing their effectiveness through, which would say nothing about the effectiveness of 4As+R in and of themselves but rather may reflect poor adaptations. Kirk et al. have some methods for adaptation to avoid compromising effectiveness that may be useful here: https://academic.oup.com/tbm/advance-article-abstract/doi/10.1093/tbm/ibz178/5650887.

There are several things in the methods that would benefit from clarification: (1) Much of the study design section has information that belongs in a separate sample section and in the data collection section -it's currently all mixed up. (2) Where were the participants interviewed? How did they promote confidentiality? (3) Methods described on p7 line 96-99 don't relate to external validity. It's about reliability here. (4) Describe Standard for Reporting Qualitative Research (SPQR) and why it's important/helpful. (5) In the results section, but ostensibly relating to methods, why do only some domains apply to implementation and other domains apply to sustainability? Was this a coincidence, or was this by design (i.e., only some domains asked about with respect to one or the other of these outcomes)?

Minor considerations

Consider renaming 'implementation effectiveness' to 'implementation success" or similar be of confusion with intervention effectiveness.

Header implementation effectiveness p7 line 112 is confusing be that's the outcome and the subsections below it are determinants of implementation, not subsets of implementation.

'adoption' p5 line 53 - if it's a trial, don't they mean potential adoption in context of theoretical scale up?

Need to define sustainability and explain why it's important in this context. Is there reason to believe that it will be a concern, maybe?

"metal-theoretical" –> meta-theoretical p5 line 30 or just delete, since I don't think this is accurate anyway

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