Reviewer’s report

Title: Improving bereavement outcomes in Zimbabwe: protocol for a feasibility cluster trial of the 9-cell Bereavement Tool

Version: 0 Date: 11 Dec 2018

Reviewer: Neil Wright

Reviewer's report:

This paper describes the protocol of a feasibility cluster trial of a bereavement intervention. The study aims to assess the feasibility of a full trial of the bereavement tool. The context of the work is introduced well, and the stages of the trial, intervention, data collection and use of focus groups are all clearly described.

The feasibility aims of the trial and success criteria are clearly identified, however further clarity is needed on some points:

- Does recruiting the 'suggested sample size' refer to the interventionists, participants, or both? In any case, it would be helpful to consider both of these as separate feasibility criteria - as recruitment of both will be critical to the feasibility of a full trial.

- It is not clear why recruitment is "within 3 weeks". Some clarity over the reasoning for this time frame would be helpful, and the paper would be strengthened overall with some clarity over the timeline of the start of the trial (recruitment, baseline questionnaires, training).

- The time frame for retention is given as 9 months on line 141, but final data collection T2 is six month post baseline.

- It is not clear why 75% is used as the success criteria for recruitment and retention.

Does the separation of the two clusters (8km in a densely populated area) reflect what would be possible for all clusters in a full trial? This will affect how relevant the findings of this feasibility trial are to a full trial.

Lines 163 and 170: It would be more accurate to say "expected contamination", since one purpose of this feasibility trial is to assess contamination.
In the analysis of the full trial, care must be taken to ensure appropriate analysis given the use of cluster randomisation and further clustering of participants by community lay interventionist. (In this feasibility trial, since there is only one cluster in each treatment arm we cannot separate treatment difference and variation between clusters.) In reporting the trial it may be useful to present observed variation within and between the clusters and the "clusters" formed by the community lay interventionists, as well as descriptive statistics for variables at each data collection time-point.

Some further minor points:

Sentence starting on Line 97: This repeats the first sentence of the paragraph (line 91). Remove one or the other.

Line 77: Should be "... generating high costs in already fragile economies ..."

Line 116: Should be "Despite these examples of use, ..."

Line 367: One of these should be "vertical axis".

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An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English**

Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

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