Reviewer’s report

Title: The reporting of progression criteria in protocols of pilot trials designed to assess the feasibility of main trials is insufficient: a meta-epidemiological study

Version: 1 Date: 27 Jun 2019

Reviewer: Michael Campbell

Reviewer's report:

The authors have answered my queries except for point 2. For only 3 clusters I don't think it is acceptable to replace a GEE analysis with a mixed effects generalised linear models. Neither model is suitable for so few clusters. In addition, one cannot really think the 3 journals they have chosen are a random selection from a universe of journals. McNeish and Stapleton (2016) show, by simulation, that fixed effects models are preferable with so few clusters. It simplifies the logic to use a fixed effect model, since one doesn't have to switch logic for the various models shown in Table 3.

Also I still think there is something that needs to be investigated when an OR for BMJ Open goes from 1.07 unadjusted to 2.43 adjusted. Is there a strong confounding between Journal and Region or Year of publication? A cross tabulation here would help.


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