#315 - A proposed pragmatic approach to determining core components of real-world programs through embedded evaluation.

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Background/Objectives/aims

Identifying core components of interventions or programs is key to effective implementation and ensuring scale-up maintains the essential features required for impact. Knowledge of active ingredients contributes to understanding what makes an intervention effective, allows for adaptation to new contexts while maintaining this effectiveness, and can aid building of implementation theory and prioritisation of barriers and strategies to address them.

Identification of core components, however, can be challenging. Currently utilised methods to identify core components are complex, time-consuming, require measures of fidelity, and are impractical for rapid knowledge translation into real-world settings. To address this, our presentation aims to outline a proposed pragmatic approach to determining core intervention components of real-world programs through embedded evaluation. This methodology aligns with a call for more pragmatic approaches in implementation science. As an exemplar, the determination of core components of a real-world, nationally implemented mental health Program for Assistance of Survivors of Torture and Trauma (PASTT) will be described.

Methods

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A mixed-methods, one-phase, multi-site evaluation of PASTT was conducted. Evaluation was underpinned by the Practical, Robust Implementation and Sustainability Model (PRISM) focussing on the outcomes of acceptability, appropriateness, and effectiveness. We adopted a holistic evaluation approach that considered all aspects of the program from intervention to implementation, governance, and funding models. Retrospective and prospective data collection was triangulated from multiple sources and stakeholders engaged with the program at diverse implementation sites. Evaluation data included published literature and guidelines, existing agency/program documentation (annual reports, budgets, client feedback, client satisfaction survey data, and case studies), semi-structured interviews with program stakeholders and clients, and a questionnaire for program partners, third-party providers, and community organisations.

Our multidisciplinary research team (n=5) comprised both experienced and novice implementation researchers and a health economist. To identify core components, we adopted a continuous reflective approach, engaging in regular discussions when analysing data. Analysis was iterative and driven by commonalities observed across acceptability, appropriateness, and effectiveness outcomes, combined with an understanding of implementation variability across multiple sites and settings. Throughout this process we maintained an ongoing and open dialog with program and government stakeholders to understand program context and perform member checking, embedding their feedback at different stages of the program evaluation.

Main findings
The process we followed in the evaluation of PASTT led us to the identification of three core components of the program for refugee clients and communities. These include: (1) adopting a culturally specialised trauma informed service delivery approach, (2) providing flexibility in the approach to service delivery and client engagement, and (3) building and maintaining connection to community.

Overall, we concluded that identification of core components can be embedded into a well-designed mixed-methods implementation evaluation of a real-world program. Figure 1 highlights elements we propose for discussion at the initial planning stages to support collaborative and pragmatic evaluation which embeds identification of core components while optimising invested evaluation resources. Having an

experienced implementation scientist lead who was embedded across all parts of stakeholder engagement, data collection and analysis was a key enabler of our approach. Future research is required to determine if this process can be applied by other implementation teams to other program evaluations.
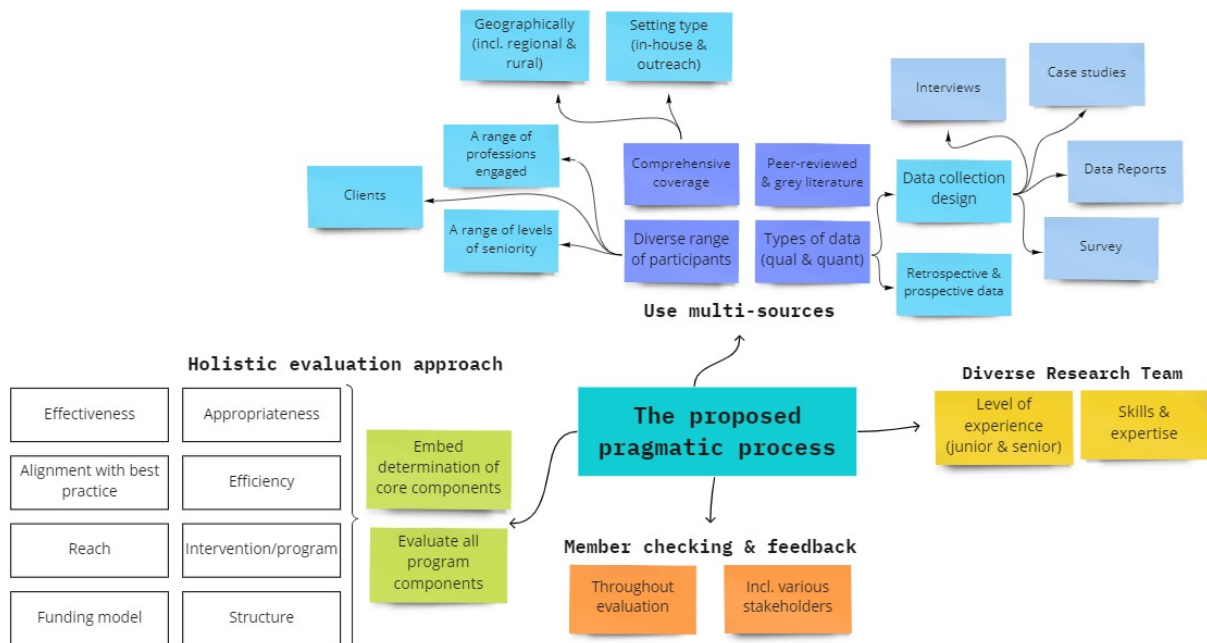
Figure 1: Elements of the proposed pragmatic process