SWAT 143: Providing monetary incentives to participants to improve completion rates of questionnaires by referred co-respondents.

Objective of this SWAT
To investigate whether payment to a participant to refer a co-respondent will improve the response rate of co-respondents and affect the quality of data provided.

Study area: Response rate, Data Quality
Sample type: Participants
Estimated funding level needed: Low

Background
This SWAT is embedded in a host trial testing an online intervention for anxious parents that requires participants (parents) to refer another adult (a co-respondent) to complete questionnaires about the child. This will allow the study team to examine agreement between parent and co-respondent ratings of child anxiety. This method of triangulating data is contingent on the participants and co-respondents being willing to engage with this strand of the trial.

While there is precedence for using co-reports in data collection, for example in research into co-parenting, there is limited research which directly addresses referral rates, co-report response rates and methods to maximise completion. Given that the challenges of follow-up data collection are well established (rates as low as 11% have been reported in online trials (1)), it seems likely that referral rates and co-respondent completion rates at baseline and follow-up will be low. This is particularly likely because the referred co-respondents have limited investment in the trial. They are involved only to provide information and are unlikely to benefit from the intervention. Within the marketing domain, where referral is a common mechanism to generate both leads (referrals) and sales, incentives have been found to improve the number of referrals made by customers as well as increasing signs-ups and buyers (2).

Financial incentives are also commonly deployed to boost data response rates in research trials and community surveys. We seek to add to this literature by investigating the relationship between financial incentives and co-respondent response rates in an online study. Given this SWAT is nested within a randomised trial which seeks to use co-respondent data, all co-respondents will be provided with a financial incentive to complete measures: £10 voucher upon completion of the measures, regardless of which SWAT group the host participant is in. However, the SWAT uses a novel design to investigate the effect of payment to the referring parent participant on the completion of surveys by the co-respondent. Parents in the host study will either be informed that they will receive a payment when their referred co-respondent completes baseline measures, or they will be asked to refer with no offer of payment.

Interventions and comparators
Intervention 1: A £10 voucher is sent to the participant when the co-respondent has completed their baseline measures. This is in addition to any payment the participant receives for completing their own measures.
Intervention 2: No additional payment to the participant.

Index Type: Incentive

Method for allocating to intervention or comparator
Randomisation

Outcome measures
Primary: Completion of co-respondent outcomes measures at baseline and at 6 months
Secondary: Interclass correlations on baseline data for the two SWAT groups, to determine if the incentive payment affects data quality.

Analysis plans
Completion of co-respondent outcomes at baseline and at 6 months will be modelled using log-binary regression models with host participant incentivised or not as a fixed effect. We will report

the relative risk for completion between the incentivised and non-incentivised groups, its 95% confidence interval and p-value.

Interclass correlations on baseline data for the two SWAT groups will be reported. Agreement between measures within groups (host participants and co-respondents) will be calculated using a Brant-Altman plot. Data quality will be quantified according to response metrics such as time taken to complete measures and compared across the two SWAT groups.

To investigate the quality of co-respondent referrals (i.e. that they are suitable candidates who have been appropriately nominated), an interim evaluation of the quality of data will be run after 120 participants have completed baseline data collection (60 in the no-payment group and 60 in the payment group). If there is an inconsistency in the quality of data from the co-respondents in the two SWAT groups, the team responsible for the host trial may take action to amend the criteria and screening for co-respondents.

Possible problems in implementing this SWAT

The team considered the possibility that those who are in the incentive group will refer less suitable candidates to be their co-respondents. This has been addressed firstly by introducing an eligibility check for the co-respondents. Secondly, the team will conduct an interim analysis after a subset of co-respondents have completed their baseline outcomes measures to compare the quality of the data between the two SWAT groups. If the quality is different in a way that would negatively affect the host trial, the team may need to alter the inclusion criteria.

References

1. Bull SS, Lloyd L, Rietmeijer C, McFarlane M. Recruitment and retention of an online sample for an HIV prevention intervention targeting men who have sex with men: the Smart Sex Quest Project. AIDS Care 2004;16(8):931-43.

2. Ahrens J, Coyle J, Strahilevitz M, Lindgreen A. Electronic word of mouth: The effects of incentives on e-referrals by senders and receivers. European Journal of Marketing 2013;47(7):1034-51.

Publications or presentations of this SWAT design

Examples of the implementation of this SWAT

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