Summary points

Standardisation has been taken to mean that all the components of an intervention are the same in different sites

This definition treats a potentially complex intervention as a simple one

In complex interventions, the function and process of the intervention should be standardised not the components themselves

This allows the form to be tailored to local conditions and could improve effectiveness

Intervention integrity would be defined as evidence of fit with the theory or principles of the hypothesised change process

Conclusion

The shackles of simple intervention thinking may prove hard to throw off. Although an intervention may be described as complex, the signs of simple intervention thinking will be apparent in how the intervention is described and whether integrity is tied to the extent to which certain standardised forms are present. Investigators should justify the approach they take with interventions—that is, whether interventions are theorised as simple or complex. Complex systems rhetoric should not become an excuse to mean "anything goes." More critical interrogation of intervention logic may build stronger, more effective interventions.

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Birth of a baby girl and social stigma

While working as a junior resident in India, I was posted to the neonatology ward of a hospital serving a rural area, where most of the babies born belonged to families from the surrounding countryside.

I soon realised that the birth of a baby girl was regarded as a calamity by the family, particularly by the father's mother. It was considered so bad that sometimes even the mother detested her newborn baby (although emotionally still cuddling her). The mother, still recovering from the trauma of the delivery, fearfully anticipated the possibility of rejection by her in-laws. In the worst cases the poor baby girl was abandoned by the family and left for adoption. In contrast, if a baby boy was born it was a joyous occasion. The family would bring sweets for the nurses and doctors as a mark of happiness and gratitude. I was really shaken by seeing this level of discrimination faced by baby girls.

Then it happened, a baby girl was born and we all got sweets. The family was overjoyed with the news of the birth of the baby girl. This came as a surprise to all of the hospital staff. Later on, I learnt from one of the nursing staff that the baby was the first girl child in this family after two generations. Then I thought that all was not lost and a silver lining could be seen in the grey clouds.

I wish that every baby girl born in this world could receive a similar welcome. Since then I have cherished this dream that one day this social stigma of having a baby girl will disappear from our society.

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