Reviewer's report

Title: Including mixed method research in systematic reviews: examples from qualitative syntheses in TB and malaria control

Version: 1 Date: 30 August 2011

Reviewer: Kate Flemming

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Minor essential revisions

1. Ordering of table 2 and 3 – as it stands table 3 features in the text before table 2.

2. Abbreviation of FGD on page 8

3. The description of rigor scores on page 9 would work better as a table

Discretionary revisions – these are some suggestions I have as to how the paper could be further improved. I think it is an important paper that will add to the field of systematic reviewing of qualitative research.

1. The paper would benefit from a brief paragraph describing what the authors consider constitutes qualitative research, as some of the types of qualitative research they included in their reviews (eg interviewer-administered surveys) may not be considered as qualitative research by some researchers. This then influences the kind of research included in syntheses of qualitative research and the way in which quality criteria are applied. Linked to this in the discussion on page 12 the authors pose the question as to whether qualitative data from mixed methods studies should be included in syntheses of qualitative research. This is an important question and it feels as if it could be addressed more within this paper in order to help guide the field.

2. I had to read the section ‘Comparative analysis of quality and rigour’ (p7) a couple of times before it became clear. I wonder if including a copy of the quality appraisal question sheet would enhance the clarity of this section. With regard to the scoring of rigour, it would be helpful to have further detail as to how this scoring was undertaken, ie presumably one point was awarded for each component, and however, if this was the case, having carried out such assessments a comment on how easy it was to appoint an all or nothing score to such criteria would be helpful.

3. The authors acknowledge the difficulty between appraising the quality of the research and the quality of the reporting of the research and what it is we are really judging when we critically appraise papers. I wonder if some of the difference in quality between the qualitative and the mixed methods was due to the space restrictions placed on reporting mixed methods studies. As many
mixed methods studies report their components in separate articles (commonly not cross referencing each other) it would be interesting to know how the mixed methods research studies were published as this may influence the quality of the reporting – ie do we get better quality of reporting in mixed methods studies when the components are reported separately than when they are reported together? It would be useful to know this. This particularly relates to the bottom 5 lines of paragraph 2 on page 9 and in the discussion on page 11 line 9-11.

4. It would be helpful to know if there were any problems with the level of detail provided in the mixed methods studies about the qualitative research – often these are reported very differently to qualitative articles

5. Section on recommendations made by mixed methods or qualitative research at the bottom of page 9 is a bit thin. It would be helpful to the reader if the depth of this section could be increased, particularly in relation to quality assessment and recommendations. At the moment the section feels like a bit of an ‘add on’, although more information is provided in the discussion.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests