Reviewer's report

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

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 21 September 2011

**Reviewer:** Mary Dixon-Woods

**Reviewer’s report:**

The authors pose a novel and intriguing question – how does the quality of mixed methods papers included in systematic reviews compare with the quality of papers using qualitative methods only?

**MAJOR COMPULSORY REVISIONS**

The Introduction is quite clearly written, but could do with presenting the research aims a little more sharply.

The methods section is more problematic. The section on “Comparative analysis of quality and rigour” could benefit from greatly improved clarity. A table directly comparing the two original reviews might help. I had particular difficulty with the para beginning “In the original reviews, responses to each criteria were graded “yes”, “no” or “unclear”...” I understood little of this paragraph. I did not understand what the authors were describing or why they made the decisions they did – e.g. reporting “mainly” on articles that scored ‘yes’ for a particular quality criterion. The authors suggest in the main text of the manuscript that they chose to assess research question, study design appropriateness, sampling, and data collection, but not analysis and interpretation. Yet it is clear from Table 2 that they did consider these latter criteria. They need to explain this better. The scoring system also needs better explanation.

The presentation of the results could also benefit from improved clarity, and possibly from more use of tables or other presentational devices.

The authors have offered a very honest and insightful discussion of the limitations of the study, but have nonetheless identified some interesting implications of their findings. The Discussion overall does feel, however, a bit too long – it makes the paper seem unbalanced given the short Results section. I would nonetheless welcome a little more discussion of the role of mixed methods studies in traditional systematic reviews of quantitative studies; at the moment the paper seems to imply that mixed methods papers are only likely to end up in qualitative reviews.

**MINOR ESSENTIAL REVISIONS**

Generally this paper is written reasonably clearly, apart from the issues mentioned above. However, there is over-use of semi-colons, and they are used incorrectly in many instances of use. They should be followed by an independent clause and not be linked to the previous independent clause by a conjunction. So
this is wrong:
As the number of mixed method studies increases, their inclusion in systematic reviews is more likely; but this poses particular methodological challenges
As is this:
Therefore, we examined 35 articles from the TB review; and 43 from the malaria review.

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 I have no competing interests.