Author’s response to reviews

Title: Enhancing the scoping study methodology: A large, inter-professional team’s experience with Arksey and O’Malley’s framework

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Author’s response to reviews: see over
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Dear Editor of BMC Medical Research Methodology:

Enclosed is a revised version of our paper, titled "Enhancing the scoping study methodology: A large, interprofessional team’s experience with Arksey and O’Malley’s framework." Attached below with this cover letter you will find in italics our point-by-point response to the reviewers’ and editorial comments.

Sincerely,

Helena Daudt

\textbf{Editorial comments}

1. I appreciated the table that was included in this version and as one reviewer noted, would like to see it referred to within the manuscript. For example, refer to the Table on page 5 when the framework is briefly described. In addition, it may be helpful to describe each of the steps in slightly more detail than a simple statement of the steps. 

\textit{We have referred to the table throughout the manuscript, have provided a brief description of the steps on pages 5-6 and a more detailed description in Table 1.}

2. I agree with the reviewer who asked for the recommendations to be placed in the abstract. While the experience of the group is important in formulating those recommendations, some readers will only look at the abstract and these (recommendations) should be the focus of the manuscript. 

\textit{We added the recommendations to the abstract.}

3. I would also like to see a brief description of the charting as used by Arksey and O’Malley and that by Rutten - what is the difference and does it make a difference to the methodology? 

\textit{We have addressed this topic on page 15-16 (section Arksey and O’Malley’s fourth step: Charting the data).}

4. Lastly, is it possible to be more succinct in describing the group’s experience and thoughts? I appreciate the story, but it seemed somewhat repetitious.”

\textit{We have reviewed the manuscript and removed repetitions as appropriate.}

\textbf{Reviewer’s report}

\textbf{Title:} Enhancing the scoping study methodology: A large, inter-professional team’s experience with Arksey and O’Malley’s framework

\textbf{Version:} 3 \textbf{Date:} 14 September 2012

\textbf{Reviewer:} Maria Grant

\textbf{Reviewer’s report:}

Major Compulsory Revisions
1. The title of the paper indicates that its purpose is to enhance the scoping study methodology, while the subtitle refers to the large inter-professional team’s experience. I recommend that the summary of
the abstract be used primarily to capitulate the recommended changes to the methodology for use by large inter-professional teams rather than recount the experiences team per se. 

*We have revised the abstract and included some of the recommendations.*

2. Purpose and Methodology

a. The statement of the purpose and methodology used in developing this paper is presented at the end of the first discussion point; this should be presented earlier in the text.  

*We have added a mention to these points on the first paragraph of the Background section.*

b. Please provide further details of the survey used to collect the team’s perspectives e.g. how many questions, when was the survey distributed, how were the results analyzed. Please consider including a copy of the survey in the appendix. 

*We have provided details on page 10 where the survey is cited.*

3. What is a Scoping Study?

a. It would be helpful to provide a description of the six steps of the Arksey and O’Malley framework before commencing the discussion of its shortcomings.  

*We have added a brief description of the six stages at the end of the Background section pg 5-6.*

b. Further detail of Arksey and O’Malley framework could also be incorporated into its description in Table 1 which currently only provides the headings of each stage.  

*We have added a description of Arksey and O’Malley’s framework stages in Table 1.*

4. Identifying the Research Question

a. The authors indicate that they ‘did not heed sufficiently’ (page 10) the Arksey and O’Malley’s suggestions that ‘researchers will want to redefine search terms and undertake more sensitive searches of the literature’ (page 10). The authors also state that they recommend that ‘research follow this advice’ (page 11). I would propose that this reflects on the experience of the project team in using this methodology rather than an enhancement to the scoping study methodology itself. 

*We would argue that our recommendation related to redefinition of search terms is similar to our recommendation related to the consultation step. Both are suggestions that Arksey and O’Malley have made but we think that they are crucial to the process and should be followed. We think that incorporating this step as a requirement will enhance the scoping study methodology and add to the discussion of its implementation.*

b. Linked to stage one of the Arksey and O’Malley’s framework in Table 1 and the writing team’s statement about ‘the types of research that it can best support’, I believe a constructive link could be made here between the writing team pondering ‘the appropriateness of a scoping study to answer a question that is solely qualitative in nature’ (page 8). 

*We have attempted to deal with this suggestion on pg 9.*

5. Identifying Relevant Studies

a. The statement at the top of page 13 referring to remaining ‘consistent in our approach to study selection’ would be better reword or repositioned in the next section on study selection. 

*We have removed the statement.*

6. Study Selection
From the information presented in Table 1 it appears that it is the Levac et al team that indicates that two reviewers apply the inclusion/exclusion criteria to papers. However, if the writing team is correct that this suggestion originates from Arksey and O’Malley (page 13), further detail is required in the table to make this explicit. 

We have addressed this topic when incorporating descriptions of each stage of Arksey and O’Malley’s framework in Table 1.

7. Charting the Data
a. Rather than start with a statement about determining ‘if we needed to make adjustments to the typology chart’ (page 15) consider starting with detail of the ‘seven pieces of information on each article’ charted by the Arksey and O’Malley framework followed by an explanation of why the team chose to use the Rutten et al typology instead.

We have reviewed and modified the entire section considering your suggestions.

b. ‘Again, effective communication was important.’ (page 16) This is the first time the importance of effective communication has been explicitly mentioned. Should it appear elsewhere too?

We have revised the section, the sentence has been removed and the sentiment dealt with elsewhere.

8. Collating, Summarizing and Reporting the Results
a. Given the stated aim of the paper, I recommend focusing on the process of using the scoping review methodology in general rather than the findings of the colorectal cancer review in particular. On this basis the section starting ‘Our findings...’ and ending ‘... chemotherapy options’ on page 19 could be removed. Other examples exist throughout the paper.

We appreciate your suggestion and have reviewed the paragraph. Adding a brief description of our findings was a suggestion from another reviewer that we thought added value to the paper. Instead of removing the entire section as suggested, we have removed some sentences in an effort to be more concise.

9. Optional Stage, Consultation Exercise
a. The writing team declare they ‘have mixed views’ (page 20) about consulting with stakeholders but then state that stakeholder participation ‘was a real strength of our inter-disciplinary approach’ and ‘we have built this consultation process into our current research... [and] see it is a fundamental step to determine how what the literature says resonates with...’ stakeholders (page 20).

In my opinion, this is a very definitive view.

We have revised the sentence to reflect our view on the consultation step.

b. ‘That being said, not all stakeholders will be appropriate to be included and researchers must make this decision carefully.’ Please provide a basis for this statement together with an indication of how the recommendation could be implement. This will enhance the utility of the recommendation.

We have added some examples to this paragraph aiming to enhance the utility of the recommendation.

10. A Large Inter-Professional Team...

a. That several team members being ‘new to research’ (page 23) is a separate issue not necessarily related to group size.

We have removed the statement.

b. Please conclude this section with a statement of specific learning points and recommendations that could be added to enhance the framework in terms of its use by large inter-professional teams.
We have added a concluding statement to the section.

11. Lessons Learned
a. Please delineate where the proposed new definition for scoping studies ends (page 24).
We have used italics to delineate the proposed new definition for scoping studies.

12. Table 1
a. To maximize its value, please ensure that linking references are made throughout the text to the table of comparative recommendations.
We have linked the table throughout the text.

b. To distinguish between Levac et al’s recommendations for the enhancement to the framework generally and the writing teams recommendations specifically in connection to the frameworks use by large inter-professional teams, please consider amending the headings of the table. We would argue that although our recommendations were based on our large interprofessional team’s experience, most of them are applicable to smaller research groups as well. We consider our recommendations a contribution to the enhancement of the framework in general and would prefer keeping the current heading of Table 1.

Minor Essential Revisions
13. Table 1 is also labeled Figure 1.
We did not find the word “figure” in the manuscript or in the table documents.

Discretionary Revisions
14. Lessons Learned
a. A question to reflect upon: At what point does an enhancement to an existing framework change the intended purpose of the original framework? When posing this question I have in mind the proposed replacement of the ‘rapid’ approach of a scoping search which that of a thorough and thoughtful approach (page 24).
We would argue that the purpose of the framework, as the authors describe in page 4 is “to clarify when a scoping study might be an appropriate method to adopt and how we might go about undertaking this kind of literature review.” The concept of ‘rapid’ is discussed by the authors on page 21: “Although scoping studies are often linked to ‘rapid’ appraisal, it would be wrong to assume that this method represents either a ‘quick’ or ‘cheap’ option.” Therefore, it is our understanding that our recommendations do not change the purpose of the original framework but rather provide suggestions that can help the achievement of its main goal.