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:

December 27th, 2012

Dear Editor of BMC Medical Research Methodology:

Enclosed is a revised version of our paper, titled "Enhancing the scoping study methodology: A large, inter-professional 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

Reviewer's report

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

Version: 5 Date: 19 November 2012

Reviewer: Maria Grant

Reviewer's report:

Final Minor Essential Revisions

1. On page three the authors indicate that they ‘drew entirely on the methods laid out in the 2005 framework by Arksey and O’Malley’ but on pages 14 and 15 subsequently state that adjustments were made to the number and role of reviewers and on page 16 that they ‘opted to adapt a typology chart from Rutten et al.’ This inconsistency needs to be addressed in the final manuscript.
We removed the word “entirely” from page 3.

2. In several places - including the second paragraph on page 8 and in Table 1 comparative recommendations - the authors emphasize that guidance on the kinds of research questions that scoping studies are most appropriate for would be beneficial. Although the authors do briefly discuss this on page 9, I would have liked to see these recommendations made more explicit in the text and in the abstract summary.

We have added a sentence to the abstract summary and on page 9.

3. Please provide a link to reference 10 from the text on page 12 to your paper on the information needs continuum.

We added the link to our paper on page 12 and 13.

4. The recommendation to assemble ‘a small suitable team’ (page 13) appears to run counter to the authors’ statement that the benefits of a large team ‘far exceeded the challenges’. Please elaborate on how the recommendation regarding small teams should be interpreted.

We added “to perform this task” to the sentence on page 13.

5. I still believe that reporting the findings of the oncology review is a distraction from the purpose of this paper i.e. the scoping review methodology as experienced by a large interdisciplinary team together with proposed modifications, and should therefore be removed. However, the opening sentence on page 20 provides the opportunity to provide a citing reference to the review for those interested in finding out more.

We removed the paragraph describing our findings(page 19) and added a link to our paper.

6. Please provide a reference to the ‘knowledge synthesis methodology’ cited on page 21.

A reference was added (#12).

7. Acknowledging the changes recommended by the authors to facilitate a scoping review within the context of a large interdisciplinary team, I would question whether the proposed change in emphasis from ‘rapidly’ to ‘thoroughly and thoughtfully’ (page 25) and adding a quality assessment step represents only a change in definition but instead a shift towards an alternative review methodology which might have been better suited to answer their original question (sic – page 8).

We believe that the addition of these steps does not represent a shift towards an alternative review methodology but provides guidance and tools that make it possible to achieve the goals of a scoping study as stated by Arksey and O'Malley. We would argue that these steps are important irrespective of the size
of the research team.

Reviewer's report

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

Version: 5 Date: 29 October 2012

Reviewer: Danielle Levac

Reviewer's report:

Minor Essential Revisions

1. Matching research interests with the Arksey & O'Malley framework

a. The authors state that researchers should consider the 'boundaries of the methodology and the types of research it can best support'. This is a difficult consideration at the moment in a developing field where boundaries have still not been clearly defined and where little guidance has been given on what types of research might be best for a scoping question. Perhaps the authors can rephrase this statement to one that urges others to contribute to the conversation on defining these boundaries.

We rephrased the comment (page 9)

b. The authors state that a SR is 'not necessarily a stand alone method in answering a research question'. I don't agree with the way this is phrased and I think this detracts from the methodology to make this statement, though I do agree with the overarching assumption here which is that SRs can contribute to larger programs of research. Indeed I think that the point is already made in the previous sentence prior to the one in question so I would consider removing this sentence (ie 'not necessarily a stand alone method).

The sentence was removed.

c. The authors state that the material was 'critically analyzed' - in view of there being many different types of analysis methods, can the authors expand on what their was involved in their critical analysis.

We expanded on the description of the analysis method we used.

2. Enhancing the six steps

a. Step 3: Engaging 2 reviewers to apply inclusion/exclusion was a recommendation of Levac et al, not Arksey & O'Malley.

We corrected the statement.

b. 'Strongly recommend that assessing for quality is factored into Arksey & O'Malley's framework.' Can the authors add here how they would recommend
that be accomplished. In the Table under your second recommendation for this step, I am not clear how quality of studies included/excluded can be assessed by 'redefining search terms and clarifying concepts in the RQ.' Please clarify.

We updated both the table and page X to state: “Quality can be assessed using validated instruments.”

c. Step 4 Charting: The way this is phrased gives the reader the impression that authors have to use Arksey & O'Malley's 7 categories and that Arksey & O'Malley recommended this. Please clarify that this isn't the case. Perhaps add a statement clarifying that authors can choose what to include in their charting framework and that while it is an option, it isn't necessary to use a pre-determined typology from another study. Can you also define what you mean by typology and how it is similar/different to a charting form as it is confusing for the reader to have a new term introduced.

We clarified our meaning about charting and our terminology on page 16.

d. "...our purpose was to determine if we needed to make adjustments to the typology chart’. This is inherent in our recommendations as to why we would meet after charting 5-10 studies. Indeed in the Levac et al paper we suggest 'refining the form' and 'continually updating the form' and as such these recommendations have been made already, so please rephrase to make it clear that you are building on our recommendations.

We have rephrased this section.

e. Step 5: It is confusing to mention your '15 variables' as I don't believe this has been mentioned before. Also the notion of variables and sub-variables needs to be defined.

Throughout the paper, we changed the word “variables” to “categories.” We also expanded on the concepts of categories and sub-categories by the beginning of page 19.

f. Step 5: The sentence 'our ability to...'' is confusing as wasn't exploring the types of information needs being discussed by researchers part of your original research question?

Our original question was related to the information needs of people with colorectal cancer, not the needs being discussed by researchers as stated at the end of page 19. We modified the sentence to clarify this point.

g. 'preliminary graphs' - perhaps add more detail to explain what the graphs were describing.

We added more detail to explain what the graphs were describing.

f. "then we did an analysis' - can you add a descriptor as to what kind of analysis.

We specified the type of analysis we did.
g. The subsequent brief examples of your findings seem to refer to 'most' and 'least' frequent mentions in the studies you reviewed. I'm not clear how this frequency count is the result of a qualitative analysis that you endorse in the previous paragraph.

The frequency count helped us to identify gaps, particularly in the area of information needs as articulated by people with colorectal cancer. We have removed this section from this paper as per the other reviewer’s suggestion and refer readers to our scoping review manuscript.

3. Lessons learned.

a. Did you assess for quality of the studies included and how?

No, we did not access the quality of the studies included.

4. Table

Step 5 - your 3rd suggestion. This is not a new suggestion and it should be removed from this column. The first suggestion: I don't believe that it provides any concrete advice or guidance to the reader and I think it should be removed.

Recommendations 1 and 3 were removed from step 5.