Reviewer's report

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

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 1 June 2012

**Reviewer:** Maria Grant

**Reviewer’s report:**

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. This is an ambitious paper that has two goals: 1) enhancing the scoping review methodology; 2) the experiences of a large inter-professional team in using the Arksey and O’Malley framework (AOF). However, it is unclear whether the authors wish to enhance the scoping review methodology per se, or enhance the methodology with specific reference to its use by large (possibly inter-professional) teams as per the adjustment referred to on page 12? Acknowledging that this paper has been submitted as a ‘Debate’ within the BMC, neither of these goals is sufficiently explored in a way I would expect within an academic journal.

2. Having stated that beyond the Arksey and O’Malley framework there is a lack of a concrete, universally agreed upon definition (page 4), the authors proceed to provide statements from other authors which appear to set out a coherent understanding of what a scoping review is within the context of this paper. This is a missed opportunity to either restate Arksey and O’Malley’s definition or to compare and contrast other published definitions.

3. Although referred to throughout the manuscript, it is not until page 12 that a sense of the size of this ‘large’ team (n=12) is given and not until page 16 that an indication is given of how the ‘inter-professional team’ is comprised. The composition of the group could be appropriately explored in the background section on page 4.

4. The methodology by which the ‘collective suggestions’ (page 4) of the ‘large inter-professional team’ were collected in drawing this manuscript together is not stated.

5. The authors state that ‘we could not say anything specific’ (page 6) because ‘we underestimated’ (page 7), and ‘we misinterpreted’ (page 7) the methodology and the fact that the likely findings arising from the application of the scoping methodology ‘can typically only offer generalizations’ (page 6). This seems to be the crux of this paper. Merely stating that ‘those undertaking a scoping review need to understand the boundaries of this methodology’ (page 7) and that ‘researchers would benefit from fully understanding how a scoping review works’ is not enough. Please draw the lessons of the writing team together within a coherent section within the manuscript and state the implications for this in
enhancing the scoping review methodology.

6. While acknowledging that the ‘framework did not offer sufficient guidance to assist us’ (page 6), even within the critical commentary, very little is explicitly stated to indicate the ways in which the authors believe the scoping review methodology could be enhanced. I would expect overt statements about what could or should be changed about the AOF. This could be achieved by:

6.1. An extended narrative within the critical commentary. The six steps of the AOF would be greatly enhanced by concluding each section with a recommendation on how the guidance for the step could/should be revised/expanded upon e.g. acknowledging the teams experience of over extending the methodology. Incidentally, it is unclear why the authors decided to extend the seven variables of the AOF scoping methodology to 15 variables/101 subcategories (page 13) thereby resulting in too much data to report.

6.2. It would be useful to add an accompanying table summarising current guidance and recommended changes/enhancements. If appropriate, this could bring together recommendations stated elsewhere in the published literature e.g. as acknowledged on page 15 ‘scoping reviews are able to inform policymakers as to whether a full systematic review is needed’.

7. Elaboration of the ‘trial charting exercise’ would be better placed on page 12 (when it is first mentioned) than in its current position on page 14.

Minor Essential Revisions

None.

Discretionary Revisions

None.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

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.