Reviewer's report

Title: A systematic review of the content of critical appraisal tools

Version: 2 Date: 3 August 2004

Reviewer: Aravinthan Coomarasamy

Reviewer's report:

General

The authors have not understood my comments - I apologize for this. As a result of not having understood my comments, I fear they have not addressed the issues raised either. Please see below

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

point 1: satisfactorily addressed.

point 2: I suspect the authors have missed the point as they have misunderstood the meaning of the word "empirical". I further suspect they have been further misguided by consulting a common dictionary, whilst they should have referred to a scientific dictionary (this being a scientific article) - there is no confusion about the word "empirical" in the biomedical and epidemiological world - it basically means from actual research evidence. For example, The Cambridge dictionary of Statistics in Medical Sciences (Everitt) defines empirical as "based on experiment or observation rather than deduction from theory or law". My point was simply that rather than mindlessly cataloging all appraisal checklists, the authors should at least point out to the ones which have been based on empirical evidence, as these are likely to be the most useful. Their current work is good, this would make it even more useful.

point 3: Is the idea that a single magic pill can cure all varied diseases crazy? yes it is. Is the idea that a single generic appraisal checklist can be applied to all types of varied research designs crazy? yes, it is. A paper such as this should take a deeper approach and not shy away from addressing important questions. Merely mentioning "all have their good and bad points" and "we do not have strong views in any direction" and "we are simply reporting" will serve no one.

point 4: Satisfactorily addressed.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

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What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable
Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
None