Reviewer's report

Title: Worked examples of alternative methods for the synthesis of qualitative and quantitative research in systematic reviews

Version: 2 Date: 31 October 2006

Reviewer: Andrew Booth

Reviewer's report:

General
This is a well written and well constructed manuscript on an issue of great topical interest. It has the potential to make a major contribution to the very specific area of systematic review methodology.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
None

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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)
It would be helpful to briefly define and discuss the two methods of synthesis together with methodological references to each (p.4) before entering the sections that demonstrate their use.

The reference to the Cochrane Qualitative Review Methods module should be enabled from within the text - it appears in the references only. It is a Group not a "groups".

Although a few readers will know what is meant by thickness - a reference to Popay's work I believe - it would be helpful to define and reference this (p.4)

The Discussion should discuss the possible effect of author PL being involved in each method - together with any observations on sequencing and "contamination" issues e.g. was it only possible for PL to do these in one particular order because of contamination. Did this prior knowledge impact on the quality of the second synthesis whichever that may have been.

References should be supplied for the methodology of both types of synthesis when they are being described to ensure us that the two methods are being demonstrated in their "agreed" form.

More reference should be made about the controversy regarding critical appraisal - including some available references e.g. Dixon-Woods, Barbour etcetera. Basically quality assessment is only required if it is either to include/exclude studies or as in this case to mediate the strength of the findings.

As mentioned in comments above re; contamination there should be an extra paragraph headed "Limitations of this study".

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Accept after minor essential 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:
I declare that I have no competing interests