Reviewer’s report

Title: The quantity, nature and quality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian mentoring literature: A systematic review

Version: 4
Date: 3 October 2014

Reviewer: Joanne Luke

Reviewer’s report:

I would firstly like to declare that as a researcher who works across the area of epidemiology and chronic disease I am not at all versed in the academic literature or theory around the field of mentoring. However, as an early career Aboriginal researcher who has been provided ‘mentorship’ by various Indigenous and non-Indigenous people both at the academic and community level I can appreciate the need for a best practise model around mentoring. I personally have benefited immensely from mentoring, but have also been harmed by tokenistic ‘mentoring’. I believe understanding the characteristics of empowering mentoring as opposed to disempowering ‘mentoring’ for Aboriginal people is important and this paper sets about doing this.

This paper considers the Aboriginal and Torres Strait context of mentoring. This is important often research fails to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts and epistemologies. This paper also looks at empowerment (control) an important social determinant that is recognised widely by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as a driver of health. The paper is also aligned with current policy priorities around evidence-based practice.

With regards to the BMC PH points to consider

• The question is well defined
• Methods are very thorough. If anything, I would suggest making it more concise and less repetitive.
• The data arising from the review appears to have been appropriately reported and interpreted.
• All figures appear genuine
• The manuscript adheres to relevant standards for reporting and data deposition. However, I believe there is some data in the discussion (figure 4) would sit better in results.
• The discussion and conclusions are well balances and adequately supported by the data. Incorporation of Aboriginal epistemologies has meant that the research is balanced.
• Limitations are stated. I think these should be in the discussion session as opposed to results section.
• Authors acknowledge this is the first systematic review of the quantity, nature, quality and characteristics of Indigenous mentoring
• The writing and language is appropriate for an academic manuscript.

Discretionary Revisions

• Abstract. Consider rephrasing ‘offending behaviour’ or clarify what offending behaviours are and who they are offending to (dominant culture/Aboriginal people/everyone???)

• Background- consider definition of empowerment in the text rather than as an endnote

• Methods- The text for search strategy is quite repetitive. I would consider editing to be more concise.- I would suggest delete all from page 5 “search strategy” to page 6 “Figure 1: Search Strategy HERE” and write “As outlined in Figure 1 a five-step systematic review method was adopted. The five-steps are described in detail below.” Then go straight to Step 1 description.

• Methods page 9. The text states “In phase 1, publications were classified according to the type of publication; in Phase 2 original publications were classified”. Could you please add some words to describe that phase 2 classified to the domains of measurement, descriptive or intervention research.

• Results. With regards to the text for figure 3. I would avoid using “declining again to one”, as it is a different time scale and not comparable to the other years 1yr vs 6 months. Instead something along the lines of “to mid 2012 (at the time of the search) only 1 paper had been published”.

• Results. The context of programs is well described.

• Is the limitations section for the results or discussion section?

• Discussion. The sentence “the findings show that Indigenous Australian mentoring has an emergent lifespan of 14 years”. I would change to “the findings show that literature around Indigenous”, as I would think mentoring (formal or otherwise) is not new, but they describing and writing about it is…..

• Discussion: figure 4 and the description of program characteristics. Should this be results or discussion?

Overall I would see this paper as being useful for policy makers. Further to this, a real strength of the paper is that it has incorporated Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing in reviewing and analysing the literature.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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