Author's response to reviews

Title: Clarifying differences between review designs and methods

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TO THE EDITORS, SYSTEMATIC REVIEWS JOURNAL

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Dear Editors,

Clarifying differences between review designs and methods

by David Gough James Thomas, Sandy Oliver

Many thanks to the reviewers for their positive and helpful comments. We have made a number of edits to improve the clarity of the paper and have addressed the reviewers’ suggestions as follows:

1. The paper needs to reference a broader set of literature on systematic reviewing since the arguments are essentially conceptual and methodological (Reviewer: Judy Sebba).

We agree that in our original submission we were too ‘economical’ with listing of references. We have added references as listed below and can add more if required:

(i) Complex interventions:


Approaches to data collection and searching in qualitative research:


(ii) Quality appraisal of studies:

(iii) Framework synthesis:
Carroll C, Booth A, Cooper K. A worked example of “best fit” framework synthesis: A systematic review of views concerning the taking of some potential chemopreventive agents. BMC Medical Research Methodology 2011, 11:29

(iv) Mixing review methodologies:

(v) Meta evaluation:

(vi) Intervention implementation fidelity:

(vii) Mega reviews:

(viii) Multivariate analyses:
Thompson SG, Sharp SJ. Explaining heterogeneity in meta-analysis: A

2. Clearer distinction between interpretative (established classification) and configurative (new classification) dimensions of reviews (Reviewer: Jane Noyes).

At the end of the section on aggregating and configuring reviews (page 10/11 in revised non tracked version) we have explained why ‘configuring’ is a different and more useful distinction than ‘interpretative’. We have also taken the opportunity to provide further clarity by making similar points about the term ‘conceptual synthesis’ and the terms ‘quantitative’ and qualitative’ research.

3. Clearer explanation about idealist synthesis (Reviewer: Jane Noyes).

At the end of the section on ‘Further ideological and theoretical assumptions’ (page 12 in revised non tracked version) we have added an extra sentence on the idealist position. We have refrained from a detailed discussion of the topic. Our aim is to make the point point that reviews vary in the questions asked and the philosophical assumptions in how those questions are addressed (and that these reflect very similar issues in debates about primary research methods).

We will upload the non tracked version of the revised paper. We will also upload a tracked version to show where changes have been made as 'an additional materials file'. The numbers of the references listed at the end are incorrect due to the tracked changes.

Yours sincerely,

David Gough for all the authors

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