Reviewer's report

Title: A Systematic Review Protocol: Social Network Analysis of Tobacco Use

Version: 1 Date: 2 June 2014

Reviewer: Alexander Tsertsvadze

Reviewer's report:

Registration with PROSPERO

Will the authors register this protocol with PROSPERO Registry? Once registered, please provide this statement and the # of registration at the end of Background section (after the research questions).

Abstract

The manuscript is missing an abstract

Background

Will the authors define or briefly describe in the first paragraph of this section what ‘social network analysis’ is? This would prevent an uninitiated reader from resorting to external sources to obtain this information.

Research questions

The research questions listed in this protocol are general statements applicable to any systematic reviews. Will the authors make these questions more specific to this review protocol? What are the specific review objectives? For example, one would provide more specific objectives in the following manner (just examples):

- What is the influence of social network structure on tobacco use behavior and what are the specific factors influencing this behaviour?
- Is it that tobacco use precedes or influences the choice of social network or peer selection, or is it the opposite, the belonging to any given social network precedes and determines consequent change in tobacco use related behavior?
- What are the factors (e.g., age, gender, socioeconomic class, degree of social isolation, membership status like clique member or liaison) that modify the association between social network and tobacco use?

The research question would ideally be formulated using PICO framework (as much as it is applicable in this case; as a minimum intervention, population, and outcomes).

Methods and design

Please, delete ‘and design’ from the section heading (it should read ‘Methods’)
Delete ‘Design’ subheading, but leave the sentence of PRISMA as it is. PRISMA
statement is a reporting guideline which does not inform on the conduct and design of any given systematic review.

Criteria for considering studies

• Please, divide this section into ‘study inclusion criteria’ and ‘study exclusion criteria’ subsections. The ‘study inclusion criteria’ should be further sectionalized by study design, population, intervention/exposure (i.e., ‘social network’), and outcomes (i.e., tobacco use and related behavior). Please, specify the outcomes of interest. Put the already available text in its respective sections.

• Will the authors provide a statement under ‘study design’ that studies describing social network analysis will be included?

• In order to put the second bullet statement into operation, perhaps the authors need to provide their own (or established standard) definition of what ‘social network analysis’ constitutes which will be helpful for determining their study eligibility and thereby aiding during study selection/screening process.

Search strategy

Will the authors add the search dates? This info could be moved here from ‘Criteria for considering studies’. Please, also add some important keywords that will be used in your search.

Data extraction

Perhaps, data extraction sheet needs to also account for a description of ‘social network analysis’ methodology used in primary studies?

Quality assessment and risk of bias

Please, delete the following statement: “…and exclude studies with few protections against bias.”

Analysis

This section needs more details and needs to be expanded. Specifically, provide what methods will be used to synthesize the results (mixed, quantitative, etc…). If there is any quantitative data, how this will be handled? What will be the summary (statistical parameters) of association and variability measures for each individual study? If data allows, would the authors consider pooling the study results? If yes, what methods will be used? What outcomes (e.g., tobacco use, behaviour change) will be pooled and what will be the measures (e.g., RR, OR, mean difference, etc…)? What will be the measures of heterogeneity? Is there any subgroup/sensitivity analysis planned in order to explore clinical and methodological sources of heterogeneity? I am not sure if publication bias is applicable to this review, but it would be useful if the authors provide a statement to this effect. This type of bias may be relevant if foreign language studies are excluded.

Discussion

Will the authors provide limitations and strengths of their review and synthesized
evidence in this section?