Reviewer’s report

Title: Systematic review or scoping review? Guidance for authors when choosing between a systematic or scoping review approach

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Reviewer: Diane Lorenzetti

Reviewer’s report:

This article differentiates between systematic and scoping reviews and provides guidance to assist researchers in selecting the most appropriate review methodology that aligns with their research questions and review purpose. Given the increasing interest in scoping reviews as an approach to literature synthesis, there is a need for articles that can provide guidance on selecting the most appropriate methodology for a given research question.

On page 3, the authors state that "there has not been clear guidance regarding the key indications or reasons why reviewers may choose to follow a scoping review approach". A number of authors including Arksey and O'Malley and Levac have been reasonably consistent in their identification of the benefits or functions of scoping reviews - for example, to map the literature in a defined discipline. Would it not be more appropriate to state that authors may be inconsistent in their interpretation of this guidance? On that note, is there any evidence to support this belief?

On page 4, the authors state: "scoping reviews (which are also sometimes called scoping exercises/scoping studies) have emerged as a valid approach with rather different indications to those for systematic reviews." The scoping review methodology is but one of many approaches to synthesis that have emerged in recent years - realist reviews being another. Prior articles that summarize various review approaches include:


The authors might consider including a sentence or two that situates scoping reviews as one of many evolving yet methodologically related approaches to conducting synthesis reviews. A recent editorial by David Moher and colleagues in BMC Systematic Reviews speaks to this:


On page 4, line 26 the authors state "In 2015, a methodological working group of the JBI produced formal guidance for conducting scoping reviews." Could the authors clarify how this manuscript expands on this previous paper?

Page 4, the authors list six purposes for conducting scoping reviews. I am unclear as to the distinction between two of these. Specifically: "To identify the types of available evidence in a
given field" and "To identify and analyze gaps in the knowledge base". As both would identify gaps in the literature, are they not two sides of the same coin? Would it not be reasonable to collapse the two into one - or, at a minimum, link them in the text?

I appreciate the authors' use of examples to illustrate instances where a scoping review would be an appropriate approach to synthesizing the literature and consider this a key strength of this piece.

Page 7 line 46, the authors assert that a "key difference between scoping reviews and systematic reviews is that in terms of a review question, a scoping review will have a broader "scope" than traditional systematic reviews" While this is certainly true, scoping reviews also differ from systematic reviews in their overriding purpose. This could also be emphasized here.

Discussion

Portions of the Discussion section seems to more appropriately belong in an Introduction - Specifically, the comparison between scoping reviews and more traditional literature reviews, and differentiation between scoping reviews and evidence maps/content analysis.

The inclusion of a discussion of how authors and journal publishers could advance the scoping review methodology and promote consistency in the application of current guidelines would be a valuable addition to this paper. For example, standard reporting guidelines similar to PRISMA guidelines for systematic reviews could encourage appropriate application, conduct and reporting of studies that adopt this methodology.

An extension to the PRISMA statement on the reporting of scoping reviews is currently under development and should be referenced in this manuscript:

http://www.prisma-statement.org/Extensions/InDevelopment.aspx

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes
Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
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