Reviewer’s report

Title: Purposive sampling in a qualitative evidence synthesis: A worked example from a synthesis on parental perceptions of vaccination communication

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Reviewer: Noreen Orr

Reviewer's report:

In this paper the authors present a purposive sampling framework that they developed and applied in a qualitative evidence synthesis on vaccination communication. The framework comprised three steps, sampling for maximum variation, sampling for data richness, and sampling for study scope. How the framework was used is described with studies from a range of settings sampled first, followed by studies that had rich data, and then finally, studies that closely matched the synthesis objectives were sampled. The authors mapped the step at which each study was sampled and the number of synthesis findings to which the studies contributed. After applying the sampling framework to the 79 studies eligible for inclusion, 38 studies were included. The experience of applying the framework is critically evaluated, with the authors addressing the challenges encountered in turn. They conclude with the suggestion that four components of the GRADE-CERQual approach could be useful for developing a sampling frame.

The paper has a clear, coherent structure and is well-written. It has a methodological focus and the title of the paper captures the content effectively. It is a good account of the value of using a sampling framework in a qualitative evidence synthesis when a large number of primary qualitative studies could be included and potentially, undermine the quality of the synthesis. With little guidance on how to sample studies for inclusion available (apart from a publication by Benoot et al, 2006), this paper makes an important contribution to the literature. The development of a five point scale for data richness could be usefully followed by other researchers and similarly, linking sampling processes to GRADE-Cerqual to understand better how they could impact on each other, could be tested in further work. Reflecting on the lessons learnt and sharing with the wider community interested in qualitative evidence synthesis is a valuable contribution to the methods literature on sampling in qualitative evidence syntheses.

Minor suggestions

Corrections/Typos

Page 11 line 55. Remove 'Could'.
Page 11 line 58. Remove 're'.

Could not see reference 23 in text.

In the Abstract it is stated that studies scoring three or more on a five point scale of data richness were sampled but on Page 10 Line 9, it states that all studies that scored 4 or higher were sampled.

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?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

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