Reviewer's report

Title: A Systematic Review of Empirical Bioethics Methodologies

Version: 1
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Reviewer: Sabine Salloch

Reviewer's report:

The authors undertook a very worthwhile work in their attempt to clarify and systematize the heterogeneous field of empirical bioethics methodologies. To my knowledge this is the first systematic review on this topic. The article contains a rather short description of the systematic review and a relatively long discussion section which focuses on three specific methodological questions selected by the authors. While this might not be the typical structure to present a SR, from my view it is justified by the theoretical topic chosen for the review. (However a short reference to the special role of SRs in bioethics could be added, for example to Sofaer/Strech 2012)

Major Compulsory Revisions

It would be desirable that the authors better clarify their own perspective to the field of empirical bioethics. They already do so in some passages but they could be even more explicit. For example the three questions selected for the discussion part seem to be guided by an interest in issues of normative justification. While this is an important perspective in this field other options would have been possible as well, e.g. creating a better understanding of the moral reality or fostering participation of stakeholders.

Minor Essential Revisions

Some more information on the search terms would be good. Are they in accordance with the controlled vocabulary of each database? Which problems did the authors have to face with regard to the development of the search terms?

In the section “Should we prioritise the thinker, the theory or the stakeholders?” the authors could indicate which of the described positions belongs to which of the accounts identified in the SR (they only done on one occasion). This would strengthen the continuity between this part off the article and the SR.

The authors make an important point when they stress that researchers have to think about the claims they want to make when they choose a distinct EE methodology. As this passage is especially important for the practice of EE research a bit more information would be desirable on which aims can be achieved on the basis of which EE methodology.

Discretionary Revisions

A short reference to recent discussions on ethical expertise could be made (especially with regard to the section „Should we prioritise the thinker, the theory
or the stakeholders?").

The authors could also give some information (e.g. in Table 3) on whether the methodological approaches have been realised in concrete empirical studies or whether they have a purely theoretical status.

**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.