Reviewer’s report

Title: Using narratives to impact health policymaking: A systematic review

Version: 0 Date: 06 Nov 2018

Reviewer: Helena de Carvalho Gomes

Reviewer’s report:

Thank you for the comprehensive work. The article follows the recommended reporting for systematic reviews (PRISMA), includes all key points and is generally well written and easy to read.

I accepted the review because I was curious to understand how you had conceptualised the topic, and I think you really did a reasonable good job. I fully agree with your statement on page 15 that the topic is challenging. I can very well imagine that you got into problems along the review process - not least because a lack of standardised vocabulary/terminology made it difficult from the start to formulate the exact review question, use PICO and translate everything into an appropriate search strategy and eligibility criteria. So I would like to congratulate you for selecting an interesting topic and not backing off from the challenge, and for a good attempt to apply a rigorous and transparent process to obtain the relevant evidence.

I still have concerns that you may have not captured what you were originally looking for. Among others because I think that there is a lack of research in this topic area, and a large part of the evidence will not be found in scientific journals and databases but will be rather hidden on websites of NGOs, advocacy groups and similar. However, I also think that your approach shows some weaknesses. What I am missing is a clear review question with a more complete description of its components (e.g. under the P of PICO, what is meant with 'specific communities' or 'groups'?). I think that that would have helped with the search concepts and list of search terms to be used (I am missing some terms for the intervention part, e.g. storytelling or messaging, and also terms for the outcome part like health communication, information dissemination etc.). It would have helped the review team to develop and apply the eligibility criteria for the selection, and ultimately the readers to be able to follow the rationale of the authors. I am also missing a clear structure of the searches. It looks like the two search concepts used were the I of the PICO, i.e. the intervention 'narratives' on the one hand combined with AND with the O of the PICO, i.e. the outcome 'policy impact' on the other. But some of the searches seem to jump back and forth and are difficult to follow, and the use of the Boolean operators are also not always clear.

Question and eligibility criteria are essential and will impact immediately all further steps of the review process.

It is of course not possible to develop and re-run the searches at this stage of the work. I also still think that despite some flaws, the article is worth being published. However, I would suggest to keep the presentation of the obtained results but, in addition, develop it further to make it also a
'methods' paper, put more emphasis on the discussion and elaborate further on the methodological challenges faced along the review process, the lessons learned and the authors' suggestions for future improvements to support readers facing similar methodological problems. To further improve the manuscript I would also suggest to be clearer on the review question, maybe try to indeed formulate it as a proper question, and more specific regarding the PICO components, and eligibility criteria.

I hope you find my suggestions helpful and wish you good luck and success with the publication and your future work.

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