Reviewer’s report

Title: Using Qualitative Evidence Syntheses to Develop Implementation Considerations and Inform Implementation Processes

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Reviewer: Andrew Booth

Reviewer's report:

A very interesting and important paper with both policy and methodological implications. This would benefit from minor restructuring particularly in separating implications for researchers and decision makers as suggested in detail below.


First, we must acknowledge that it is very challenging to review one single paper in a series without sight of the companion papers. This review has therefore focused on the accuracy of the extant paper. Where suggestions are made for additional content it would be considered a sufficient authorial response to signpost where this omission is already addressed in a companion paper, where relevant.

Abstract

Background: This section implies that "implementation" is only a minor subordinate feature of the qualitative evidence base. However, the subsequent Methods section of the Abstract makes implementation a major focus. Suggest that the Background section is tweaked to make this expectation clearer from the start: "In addition to incorporating standard data on effectiveness WHO guidelines are increasingly using evidence that explores acceptability and feasibility, derived from QES, to address important implementation considerations".

"to develop implementation considerations" Prefer "identify" as they already exist in the synthesised dataset.

Conclusions: The Conclusions section of the Abstract is rich but confusing. Part of the reason for this is that the Conclusions operate at different levels and target different decision-makers. I suggest that instead they are structured around different target audiences e.g. implications for researchers then implications for policy makers. At the moment this achieves a scatter gun effect which is difficult to follow.
Background

The first two paragraphs of the Background are fairly sparse in terms of supporting referencing. They assume an internal knowledge of the WHO process. It would be helpful to add a few more supporting references to allow the interested reader to derive a clearer picture of the WHO process through follow up reading, if desired.


It would be very helpful to move the description of the three papers from the Methods to the Background (where it describes this third paper). The Methods section will then refer to the three papers generically.

Methods

"the result of a range of processes". What is described is not really a "range" of processes - they reflect diversity not extremes.

"a number of processes" - How many, exactly?

"The technical team then created EtD frameworks for each of the guideline's questions or recommendations." Potentially confusing because questions and recommendations represent different ends of the process. Perhaps "or areas to be targeted by recommendations" because current wording implies that you know what the recommendations are a priori whereas I presume you mean that you can anticipate what areas you will recommend in even though the exact nature of these will only emerge from the findings?

Given their centrality to the subsequent discussion it would be helpful to define formally both "conditional (context-specific) recommendation" and "implementation consideration", perhaps in a Box? Furthermore it might be helpful to distinguish conceptually between what are limitations of evidence and what are limitations of context as this seems central to the confusion between application of these two terms.

"failed in other ways to meet our needs" - "our" is ambiguous given that the authors represent both decision-makers and technical teams with two distinct but related types of need. Perhaps frame as specific types of needs?

"In some cases, the team combined this information with other sources of information, including research-based or non-research-based information from the EtD frameworks, information from
external sources, and input from invited stakeholders." Technically this raises two questions: (i) how was the reliability of these types of information assessed? If at all? (ii) how was this information combined with more rigorously derived information and how was its influence circumscribed. Needs further explanation.

"The process from QES finding to implementation consideration" Prefer "The process of transformation from QES finding to implementation consideration"

The discussion of the normative values of WHO, while fascinating, is methodologically confusing. Are the authors able to make a suggestion as to the point at which these norms should consistently be introduced into the process. For example, a team that has worked regularly with the WHO will recognise these normative values from the beginning (which may explain the current suggestion in the Lessons Learnt) while a newer team may need to sensitise themselves to these issues. NICE handles this by introducing these values explicitly at the end of the technical process and perhaps there is some claim for WHO to do the same?

"a range of challenges" Not a range! Diverse!

**Discussion**

As mentioned above in connection with the Abstract this Discussion would be a lot clearer if it separated considerations for technical teams from considerations for decision-makers. I suspect that the dual authorship has resulted in these getting lumped together - it would be a much more actionable document if split into implications for review teams and implications for decision makers.

"wide range of formats" Not a range! Diverse!

I felt ambivalent about the inclusion of material on derivative products. While this is self-evidently a good idea it is not strongly "evidence based" and does not seem very clearly determined by the experience of the teams as recorded in this article. Could the team make a clearer and stronger case between the characteristics of the derivative products and their experience from this process. Otherwise this section simply seems like a tangentially related news item.

Similarly, the Logic Model (Fig 3), although very interesting and useful in a wider context, feels tacked onto this article. I feel that the Logic Model requires further explanation e.g. it is neither a Structural nor Process based Logic Model and, in fact, does not follow a theory of change model (instead it is based on a mid-range theory) which makes it strictly speaking more a conceptual model rather than a logic model. Probably best to sidestep all this need for explanation and source of potential confusion?
Conclusions

As with Discussion this needs clearer structuring perhaps as two paragraphs for review teams and decision makers respectively (cp the Box 1 which I found very helpful and useful).

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