**Author's response to reviews**

**Title:** How do third sector organisations use research and other knowledge? A systematic scoping review.

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**Author's response to reviews:** see over
Dear Prof Signe Flottorp

Thank you for considering our paper for publication in Implementation Science, and thanks too for the helpful and useful comments from the two peer reviewers. We have addressed these below, point by point, and in the manuscript, and look forward to hearing from you again in due course. Please not that since both reviewers suggested a re-organisation of the main findings section, we have not made the changes as tracked changes; but below we indicate the pages and paragraphs where changes have been made.

We look forward to hearing from you in due course,

Yours sincerely

Rebecca Hardwick
Rob Anderson
Chris Cooper

Referee 1: Anita Kothari

Abstract

Minor essential: although the term ‘scoping’ is in the title, it would be helpful for the reader if it was also explicitly mentioned in the abstract.

Thank you for this comment. This has been updated in the abstract, (p2, paragraph 1) which now reads

“Background: Third sector organisations (TSOs) are a well-established component of health care provision in the UK’s NHS and other health systems, but little is known about how they use research and other forms of knowledge in their work. There is an emerging body of evidence exploring these issues but, as yet, there is no review of this literature. This scoping review aimed to summarise what is currently known about how health and social care TSOs use research and other forms of knowledge in their work.”

Given that it is a scoping review, do the authors have anything to suggest about whether a full systematic review is warranted or not?

The peer reviewer raises an interesting point as to whether we think a full systematic review is warranted; if the review aimed to assess the effectiveness of different knowledge mobilisation strategies in TSOs we are not sure, following our searching, that there is enough literature to make a full systematic review worthwhile. However, it may be a useful review to undertake in the future. We have reflected this point in the Discussion, p20, paragraph 2.

Discretionary: Readers who are unfamiliar with third sector organisations may need to understand the functions carried out by these agencies. After describing these functions the authors can make a
stronger case for why research-informed decision making is appropriate for this sector. For example, functions like front line delivery of services, development of resources for other organisations involved with front line care delivery and/or advocacy work could all benefit from an evidence based orientation.

Thank you for this point, the definition of third sector organisations included in Table 1 has been revisited, and further detail added pointing out the kinds of functions that third sector organisations carry out. The point about why this makes them an important focus for work on research use and knowledge mobilisation has been added into the background section on p5 paragraph 1.

Background:

Major: This section could be strengthened by defining ‘scoping review’ with some reference to indicate which scoping review approach is being followed (e.g., Arksey and O’Malley)?

Thank you, following some further reading, a paragraph has been inserted at the start of the methods section (p5, paragraph 3) which provides a definition, as well as the different steps included in a scoping review. We cite Colquhoun et al’s recent paper on scoping reviews [1], which refers to Arksey and O’Malley’s approach.

Methods:

Minor: It would be useful to know which steps in a ‘traditional’ scoping review were followed and which were additional steps introduced by the authors. For example, it is not clear why a sensitizing search was done, and whether it would be useful for others to carry out this step.

Thank you. The steps followed have been clarified, and justification and explanation of not conducting consultation (step 6 in a scoping review) is included. To clarify, the initial searches were done originally in preparation for a funding application, and therefore needed to be supplemented with more systematic searching. A sentence has been added to the text to reflect this, p 6, paragraph 2. “It was initially carried out to inform a funding application.”

Discretionary: What years did the search for lit cover?

Thank you for this comment, the secondary, bibliographic searches were run from database inception in each case. The date range and data parameters for each database are recorded in the search annex for this paper, and we do not think it is vital to reproduce them in the main body of the manuscript.

Discretionary: there are a couple of places where information is missing (pg. 5 – citing PubMed; pg. 6 – reference to the table of inclusion/exclusion criteria).

Thank you, these have been updated or amended as necessary.

Discretionary: p7 – Further justification for excluding CBPR could be made on the grounds that CBPR has different aims than KM. CBPR is about data collection and partnerships with community groups for the purposes of empowerment and change, while KM focuses on partnership for the purpose of research uptake. While change might be a goal for KM, e.g., changes in practices or services, empowerment is not usually on the KM radar.
Thank you. We discussed this point, and did not reach consensus on whether or not all authors agree that empowerment is not usually on the KM radar, and therefore whether to include this additional justification. As we remain undecided, and are also content with the existing justification, we have not changed the text following this comment.

**Discretionary:** I suggest removing the section on quality. Instead, when you provide a definition of a scoping review, and the authors whose scoping review approach you are following, you could also say that scoping reviews do not typically assess the quality of studies (with supporting references).

Thank you, the section on quality appraisal has been removed and a sentence included in the Methods section, p 5 paragraph 3.

**Discretionary:** P9 Rather than stating that no formal evidence synthesis was conducted, you might say that findings were synthesised through narrative reporting of these three thematic areas.

Thank you. The revision of the results section (see comment below) required further analysis and synthesis. Therefore, the text now reads: “A simple thematic analysis was carried out (by RH) which mapped the range of issues the included studies raised, and to identify areas for future research. The results are presented as a narrative synthesis.” P 9 paragraph 1

**Results**

**Major Compulsory Revision:** This is an important article, but the findings get lost when each study result is presented individually. Instead the findings ought to be presented thematically, not by individual study (furthermore this information is already in a table for the readers). The authors might use the data extraction fields – the KM strategies studies, the types of decision studies, the barriers to KM, the strengths to KM in this section, and study strengths and limitations – as the thematic areas. This presentation format will make it easier for others to see where the gaps in the literature are and areas that are being addressed.

Thank you for this feedback, which also echoes feedback from the other reviewer on the difficulties in comprehending and reading the results section getting in the way of understanding what the results mean. Following discussion amongst the authors, the results section has been reorganised and is now presented under relevant themes. Pp 9-17

**Discussion**

**Discretionary:** after a re-organisation of the results some of the discussion points might become redundant.

It is our view that the discussion still holds following the re-organisation of the results, so apart from a few minor deletions of redundant text, the discussion remains largely as was.

**Other issues the authors may wish to take up:**

A disadvantage or issue with community-based agencies conducting research (‘internally generated evidence’) is the fact that most are not beholden to an ethics review board. On the other hand, more and more public health organisations have set up their own ethics and research review process.
The need for critical assessment of informal knowledge in the same way that research studies are assessed. What criteria might be important to consider when evaluating the goodness of tacit and experiential knowledge.

Third sector organisations are often involved in advocacy efforts. What might the role of research be in these processes? Advocacy is not traditionally addressed in the KM field.

Thank you, the referee raises some issues which are of interest, but on balance, we think the discussion as is flows well from the results, and there is a risk of confusing this if the additional points about ethics or advocacy and knowledge mobilisation are also included. The point about the need for critical assessment of informal knowledge however has particular resonance, and this is now reflected in the discussion (p 19, paragraph 2; p21, paragraph 2)

Minor: I would suggest moving the section about limitations into the main discussion section

Thank you, we agreed and have moved it to p20.

References need attention.

Thank you, references have been reformatted.

Referee 2: Robin Miller

Major Compulsory revisions: However, the overall nature of the task can be questioned - is it possible to group together such a diverse group of organisations (which will include small community based providers relying on charitable donations and voluntary efforts) which large entrepreneurial ones which have major government contracts and volunteering largely on their boards, along with all those who work in the very different areas within and between health and social care (with key issues regarding the cultural and professional backgrounds within them), And to that heady mix can be added the differences between countries. It may be that sufficient similarity and synthesis can be done, but the article does not currently convince that this is the case and this needs to be addressed.

This is a well-made point, and is reflected in the literature (i.e. the disparate, heterogeneous nature of third sector organisations). Whilst we agree that there may be limitations, in terms of the feasibility of synthesising such diverse studies, the objective of this review was to scope the literature in order to understand the kinds of research that has been done on research/knowledge use, and to look at what that research has shown.

We feel that the review is still warranted, but we have clarified ‘scoping review’, to make it clearer to the reader the intention of the review, and therefore any limitations. The results section has also been reorganised to demonstrate more clearly the emerging themes from the literature on TSOs and knowledge mobilisation, which we feel addresses the final point on convincing that a review is possible and worthwhile.

The analysis is essentially framed around the focus of the studies, with the studies presented in sequential order. With the very different nature of the studies, this makes it quite hard work for the reader to try and pick out and compare the findings. I wonder if it would be better instead to synthesise findings regarding different supports and barriers from across the studies?
Thank you, the results section has been reorganised in light of comments from both reviewers in order to make it easier to read, more logical, and easier to get a sense of relevant similarities and differences between the findings of different studies.

It is not clear how the use of research etc. by TSOs differs (or not) from health and social care organisations within private and public sectors – perhaps some initial overview of this literature, followed by your findings and then a comparison would add more depth?

This is an important question, but was not one of the review aims. Our purpose for this review was to focus on third sector knowledge mobilisation only, not to compare it to the public sector. Where the public sector has been referred to in relation to the third sector, it is to do with the quantity of research on knowledge mobilisation being greater amongst public sector organisations (p4/5) and a reflection that we cannot make claims of difference (between sectors) in this review based on the evidence included (p20, paragraph 2.) We think that the point raised by the reviewer would need a separate review, with different research questions, to the one presented. Therefore, we have not included an overview of that literature or conducted a comparison.

**Minor essential revisions** You exclude social enterprise from your definition of third sector organisations – SE are often included in this definition (and may be in some of the reviews that you mention)? Indeed many, if not most TSOs in the UK would meet the definition of a social enterprise, even if they do not choose to take that label.

The reviewer makes an important point about acknowledging uncertainties surrounding whether some included studies were researching social enterprises. This has been addressed in the Limitations section, p21, paragraph 2.

**References**