Reviewer's report

Title: What value is the CINAHL database when searching for systematic reviews of qualitative studies?

Version: 1
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Reviewer: Jessie McGowan

Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revisions
The authors’ note: Its thesaurus includes a range of terms relating to qualitative research methods e.g. qualitative studies, action research, naturalistic enquiry, ethnographic research suggesting that its coverage of qualitative research could be more extensive than other databases. How did you determine that its thesaurus was complete? Did you use predefined definitions of qualitative research to determine this? You need to substantiate why CINAHL could be more extensive than other databases.

The idea of uniqueness is important as its one of the two questions asked. I don’t think the discussion and conclusions revisit this question in enough detail. For example: For 18 out of 43 of the reviews included in our sample the CINAHL database had contributed at least one unique study (see Table 2) and, for 5 of these [16, 34, 37, 50, 61], we found that all the included studies were available in the CINAHL database and had the potential to be retrieved from the database assuming a good strategy and appropriate indexing were in place. What does this really mean? 41% of the studies included at least on unique study but what were the total numbers of articles from the 43 and 18 studies? Is one unique study in an SR really important? Would it change the outcome of the SR if it was missed? Would it have been picked up by another database? It would be good to explore the issue of uniqueness more in the discussion section.

Minor Essential Revisions
A quote is needed for the statement: Nevertheless, it is considered that some databases are more useful than others for specific types of review and CINAHL is generally thought to be a good source to search when conducting a review of qualitative evidence.

Results section of the abstract: For all 43 reviews in our sample we found that some of the included studies were available in CINAHL. For 9 of these, all the studies that had been included in the final synthesis were available in the CINAHL database so it could have been possible to identify all the included studies (just for these 9) using just this one database.

I would rethink what to put in the section. Of the 43 studies, 21% had all their included studies in CINAHL. However, how do you know in advance if the database is sufficient or not…..that would be very interesting to know.
It would be good to include the actual references in the results section. For example: Only six of the 43 reviews did not use any supplementary search methods to identify potential studies for inclusion - I’d like to know which six.

Discretionary Revisions

Consider rewording the intro to the methods section as I had to read it a few times to be clear that you just didn’t use 10 studies. Maybe start with something like “to develop and then refine our inclusion/exclusion criteria, we selected a small convenience sample”….

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests