Reviewer’s report

Title: Systematic review adherence to methodological or reporting quality

Version: 0 Date: 21 Dec 2016

Reviewer: Tanya Walsh

Reviewer’s report:

Thank you for asking me to review this manuscript. It is an interesting read, and it is clear that the author team have worked hard on the research. There are a number of points to be considered before publication, principally the impact of poor quality conduct and reporting of the particular items found in this research, and consideration of the results of the research conceptually similar items across checklists (and time). My specific comments are as follows:

Abstract

0 The objective (Abstract) as stated is complex and confusing, the authors have given an objective within an objective: 'The objective of this study is to evaluate SR methodological and reporting item adherence across methodological overviews with the objective of assessing methodological or reporting 'quality' of SRs.' Could you re-phrase the objective in terms of i) methodological quality using AMSTAR and OQAQ assessment tools and ii) reporting quality using PRISMA and QUORUM reporting guidelines?

0 Missing data and inconsistencies in the Results (Abstract) section: Results from 56 reports but 76 were eligible for inclusion. What about the other 20 reports? And the results are informative with regard to things that are done well and not so well, but there are some inconsistencies of the numbers reported in the abstract and in the main text.

0 The Conclusions (Abstract) does not present the implications of the research for systematic review authors. It's useful to know that some of the items are less well reported than others, but perhaps it's the nature and the consequences for decision making that is the important point here, rather than the fact that some items are reported less well than others.

Main text

Objectives - The text of the objective in the introduction differs from that of the abstract 'The objective of this study was to determine SR use of and compliance with quality assessment tools and reporting guidelines as identified in methodological reports of SRs.' With this objective there appears to be less interest in assessing the 'quality' of the included SRs.

Definitions and important concepts - It is good that the authors have discussed the distinction of quality of methods and quality of reporting. A sentence or two discussing whether the items in
the two quality assessment tools exclusively relate to quality (and not reporting) and vice versa for the two reporting guidelines would be of interest.

Eligibility criteria - I understand that the justification for the search starting at 1990 relates to the publication date of the tools / guidelines. But could there be a temporal effect in terms of compliance with tools / guidelines (e.g. OQAQ 1991, AMSTAR 2007)? And does information from methodological overviews published in early 1990s still have relevance today?

Results - The recently completed methodological review is often referred to but the reference is incomplete. Relevant information for the current manuscript (e.g. ‘20 of the 76 reports 217 were excluded for not using one of those tools. The tools or criteria used by the 20 reports were reported in a separate manuscript[14]’) is not reported but referred to in this 'missing' publication.

It would be useful to know how many of the 5371 SRs were updates (same publication but subsequently updated and treated as a different publication).

There are discrepancies between the numbers reported in the text and in tables, and in the manuscript overall.

The comparison between similar items in the i) methodological tools and ii) the reporting guidelines is very limited. Are items that are conceptually similar occurring with the same proportion for example in QUORUM and PRISMA? Is there any evidence of improving standards over time?

Tables

0 The items assessed as written in the manuscript differ from the published checklist, and this can be a source of confusion. For example for the QUORUM table there is no 'Title' item or 'Validity assessment' item. Is this an oversight or is it due to a zero frequency? The ability to compare across reporting guidelines is impaired due to this missing data.

0 The tables need to have an 'item number' column if you are including text such as 'see item x' in the item description column. For example in the PRISMA table you have an item description of 'Present data on risk of bias of each study and, if available, any outcome level assessment (see item 12)' for the risk of bias within studies item.

Level of interest
Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:
Acceptable

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