Author's response to reviews

Title: Structural barriers in access to medical marijuana in the U.S.: A systematic review protocol

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Author’s response to reviews:

Dear Reviewers,

Thank you for your comments. Please find below an itemized response to your comments.

Associate Editor’s Comments

Comment 1: --Where do you discuss how you will appraise qualitative studies?

Response: In addition to the qualitative research studies meeting the inclusion criteria for this review, qualitative research will be appraised by the rigor of the study’s sample selection, data collection, and data analyses as spelled out by Kuper, Lingard, & Levinson (2008).


Comment 2: Reporting and publication biases do not cease to be a problem because a meta-analysis is not estimated. In fact, one of the benefits of meta-analysis is that it allows for the examination of where and how publication bias might occur. While a meta-analysis may be inappropriate for the type of review you propose, you do need to attend to these issues in greater depth in the protocol.

Response: please see lines 176-184 for more explanation of how this study will address publication bias.

Comment 3: Discussion of synthesis methods is still lacking. Exactly how will you develop an overarching synthesis? Given your framework of structural violence, I suggest you consider framework synthesis and cite and discuss it appropriately.
Response: The objective of the scoping review will be to summarize and disseminate the current literature regarding structural barriers to patient access of medical marijuana. Synthesis of previous studies is not the aim of a scoping review (Arksey and O’Malley, 2005). The four stages of the scoping review have been added to lines 94-98.

A more robust definition of structural violence has been added to the protocol. The method used for articulating what constitutes a structural barrier of medication access has been added to the protocol. These additions to the protocol can be found from line 19-24.


Comment 4: Your search strings do not include truncations or wild cards--is this on purpose?

Response: The strategy used for this search was designed without truncation and wildcards to effectively search across the various databases used for this systematic review. The key concepts and terms were strategically tested to yield the desired results.

Comment 5: No need to mention PROSPERO as publication in Systematic Reviews counts for pre-registration.

Response: the section on PROSPERO has been deleted from the manuscript.

Reviewer #1 Comments:

Comment 1: You say you have changed the review to a scoping review rather than an intervention review however you still use the heading - description of the intervention? This doesn't appear to be an appropriate title to this section and the title doesn't work with the text you have written. Perhaps call the section Objective of the scoping review.

Response: Thank you for your comment. We have revised the heading to “Objective of scoping review”.

Comment 2: Description of the intervention section, you justify the use of structural violence by repeating the previous sentence with a separate reference. you could edit this section to be briefer and include more explanation of why these factors (economic and social factors) matter to what you are trying to do and why therefor this framework is appropriate and how this framework will inform the analysis.

Response: The Objectives of Scoping Review section has been refined based on these comments.

Also this might be the better time to discuss that this is a scoping review, rather than later on in the search methods section. (its also not referred to in the abstract)
Response: The scoping review stages have been added to the objective of Scoping Review section lines 95-99.

Comment 3: You have a data collection and analysis section, however you there is no discussion of the method of analysis, or how the different types of studies will be synthesised together. I think this is important information as the this will underscore the rigour of your review.

Response: Since medical marijuana has not been approved as a drug by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, it is challenging to find any randomized control trial that examines the clinical use of marijuana among U.S. populations. Therefore, we cannot conduct any meta-analyses or forest plots to assess treatment effect of medical marijuana.

Data dissemination will be in the form of a flow chart to provide a visual representation of the scoping review’s study inclusion and exclusion process. Data dissemination will also be in the form of tables that will show the structural barriers identified in the scoping review and the frequency of studies that discuss the particular barrier. This is included in the Objectives of a Scoping Review section lines 95-99.

Comment 4: in the selection of studies section, the wording of lines 57-59 pg 6 and 4-5 pg 7 where you detail the second step in the review stage, is clunky and unclear, you might wish to edit for clarity.

Response: Thank you for comment. The selection of studies section has been revised accordingly for clarity.