Reviewer’s report

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

Version: 0 Date: 17 Jan 2017

Reviewer: Michael Burrows

Reviewer’s report:

The protocol highlights an interesting piece of research and a gap in the existing knowledge base. It in part establishes a context for the research by discussing a variety of factors which are shown in existing research as potential barriers to access.

1

You discuss the need to and importance of understanding barriers to medical marijuana access and provide context in the introduction however a more developed concept of why this research is important is needed. Currently you state

"This review seeks to generate the necessary science for informing the collective public health discussions on patient access and state medical marijuana programs."

It isn't clear what you mean here, yes you want to understand the structural barriers but why? To what end?

2

The second paragraph in the Gender and race section of the introduction doesn't seem relevant. The article is centred on medical marijuana and this section discusses it in relation to criminal justice and arrest surely if the marijuana is legally procured this isn't an issue? Also it doesn't speak to the structural barriers that you are exploring in your work.

3

In the section on stigma you write:

"Physical availability of medical marijuana increased the number of marijuana users and the frequency of use (Freisthler and Gruenewald, 2014)."

Is it possible to include and idea of by how much?

Also you say:
"It has been suggested that a 35% general increase in marijuana consumption within a month interval parallels the increasing trend of MML ratification throughout the United States (Chu, 2014)."

It wasn't clear what you meant here.

4

In the description of intervention section, more detail of why biosocial understanding and structural violence are relevant to the work you will be doing? What do they add?

5

In the methods section, justification for why you are only including peer-reviewed literature in the review would be interesting.

Also would it be possible to include you search strategy for the literature searching? Often an important tool for people reading your work to understood how you developed and used you search terms.

6

In the selection of studies section, you state that the first part of the review is undertaken by 2 reviews however you then state that the the full stage review has 3 reviewers. I wondered if this was a mistake? And if not why go from 2 to 3 reviewers?

7

Discussion of the quality assessment of the studies is missing from this section. How will this be undertaken? What tools will be employed? By what criteria will you remove studies based on the quality assessments? (I know you discuss the assessment of reporting bias but this needs more detail).

8

Analysis

You discuss the method of CFA in the synthesis section but this, if I am reading it correctly, is a backup if the studies do not meet the heterogeneity requirements and no discussion is given of the process of the meta analysis, the sequence of events or the tools/software that you will use to perform the meta analysis. Discussion of the method, as it is your primary method is needed.

In the protocol you state that both qualitative and quantitative research is eligible for inclusion in the research. However there is no discussion of how qualitative research will be analysed, what methods will be employed and how this analysis will be synthesised with data from the
qualitative research. If you are planning to include qualitative research then some discussion of how this will be analysed and included in needed.

9

The written style of the article is overly verbose in place and this can effect the readability and comprehension of the article, for example you say:

"The study does not anticipate to encounter articles in any language other than English because of the geographic scope delineated in the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

the sentence is clunky isn't easy to read. I would suggested that the article be further proofed for clarity and readability

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Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

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Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

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