Reviewer’s report

Title: Disclosure of domestic violence and sexual assault within the context of abortion: meta-ethnographic synthesis of qualitative studies protocol

Version: 0 Date: 08 May 2017

Reviewer: Zack Marshall

Reviewer’s report:

Overall

This manuscript requires extensive revisions. There are three major challenges:

1) This review requires a detailed and highly complex search strategy. This strategy has not been adequately described.

2) There is a lack of clarity in describing concepts, objectives, and study design.

3) The authors appear to be attempting to force descriptive qualitative studies into a framework for more structured forms of research. While narrative synthesis may be a good fit, referring to interventions and outcomes seems inappropriate (based on the information provided). A number of times, I wondered if scoping review methodologies or evidence mapping might be a better option, especially when the authors are so unclear about the literature that is currently available. If the authors proceed, I would recommend looking at other reviews of descriptive studies that have used narrative synthesis - with particular attention to the ways they describe their methods. For example, Vallido, T., Wilkes, L., Carter, B., & Jackson, D. (2010). Mothering disrupted by illness: a narrative synthesis of qualitative research. Journal of Advanced Nursing, 66(7), 1435-1445.

Note: more careful editing also needed - there are multiple spelling and grammatical errors.

I. Title

This is a narrative synthesis of qualitative research - would recommend including this in the title.

II. Abstract (and throughout the paper)

Health professionals in general or abortion providers

In some places, the authors refer to health professionals and in others to abortion providers. It would be helpful to clarify the specific focus of this review - for example, are we talking about abortion providers specifically, or healthcare providers in the broader context of abortion?
Domestic violence, violence, sexual assault, sexual violence and incest

These terms are used interchangeably in some places. I would recommend more explicit use of terms and a clarification of whether childhood experiences of physical or sexual violence are included as part of this review.

III. Background

Australia or all high income industrialized countries

The background specifically relates to information from Australia but the review will include research from any high income industrialized countries. In order to expand the potential audience for this review, I would recommend revising the Background section to include more general data from high income industrialized countries (and on this note, please provide a reference for how high income industrialized countries will be defined (and identified)).

Specific comments:

Page 3, lines 13-16: Not clear how this information links to this review. If needed, please provide reference.

Page 4, lines 5-8: Authors mention there is no synthesis of existing qualitative or mixed methods data - is there a synthesis of quantitative data?

IV. Objectives

Given that the authors seem concerned that there may be limited research on this topic, is it necessary to limit this to attitudes and experiences of healthcare providers? What about saying: the aim of this review is to synthesize qualitative research related to: "healthcare providers who experience disclosure of domestic violence or sexual assault in the context of abortion", or "abortion healthcare providers who experience disclosure of domestic violence or sexual assault" or "disclosure of domestic violence or sexual assault in the context of abortion". This way the review is not limited by focusing unnecessarily on "attitudes and experiences".

Note, in the Discussion additional goals are identified. Would it make sense to include them as part of the objectives?

V. Study Design

From the description provided, there is no indication that this review will include interventions or effectiveness studies. Despite this, the authors seem to rely on guidelines related to
interventions. This leads to wording that does not seem to fit the context including a focus on "outcomes". What are the outcomes in this type of qualitative research?

This problem becomes apparent later when the authors discuss Population and Exposure. If it is necessary to describe the studies in this way, there are two populations - no? Abortion healthcare providers, and women who experience domestic violence or sexual assault. For the abortion healthcare providers, they experience disclosures of domestic violence or sexual assault. The women themselves are the ones exposed to domestic violence or sexual assault, not the abortion healthcare providers. There seems to be a mismatch here.

For the healthcare providers, would this also include psychiatrists?

Definitions of domestic violence and sexual assault

Definitions of domestic violence and sexual assault are described here. Question - do studies that meet the inclusion criteria need to use the same definition? How will different definitions be handled in the review?

Incest is mentioned in line 15. Will studies with participants under 18 be included? Are we talking about incest that leads to pregnancy (and abortion)? Please clarify.

VI. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

This section needs extensive revisions.

1) Abortion is identified as a key element of the review up to this point. Here, the authors seem to be stating that if there is not enough information about disclosure of violence to healthcare providers in the context of abortion then it will be expanded - but this is not at all clear. Does this mean the review would then shift to explore disclosures of violence to healthcare providers in many different settings (unrelated to abortion)? This would seem to be a very different review with different objectives and search strategy etc.

2) It seems that the inclusion criteria are:

   a) focus on disclosure of domestic violence or sexual assault at time of abortion

   b) focus on perspective of healthcare providers

   c) detailed description of qualitative methods or mixed methods with qualitative component

   d) published in English

   e) high income industrialized countries (how will this be defined?)
f) peer-reviewed or grey literature

VII. Search Strategy

The search strategy is not clearly described. This review requires a highly complex search strategy to identify literature from five different search areas: domestic violence, sexual assault, abortion, healthcare providers, and qualitative methods (or mixed methods with qualitative component). Each of these terms is complicated and will required a nuanced approach to identifying the literature. A sample search strategy should be developed in collaboration with a librarian and included with the manuscript. Without this, it is impossible to determine the quality of the proposed review.

VIII. Study Design #2

There are two Study Design headings. Under Study Design #2, it says "The following electronic databases, considered the most appropriate for the topic" - by whom? Was a librarian with expertise in reviews consulted? For example, Medline is a subset of PubMed. Is it necessary to include them both?

In this section, I would suggest additional details about the specific search strategy, rather than how to do searches in general.


For the description on backwards and forwards snowballing, please describe the specific strategies, particularly for forwards snowballing (e.g. scopus or google scholar?). One or both of the references below may be more useful.


IX. Grey literature searches
No clear rationale is provided for the inclusion of grey literature (in addition to academic databases and forward and backward snowballing). One idea would be to run initial searches of academic databases in order to demonstrate the number of references.

A couple of questions - is google scholar the best approach for locating grey literature? It is more focused on academic literature. For google scholar (and other grey literature databases) what is the plan if there are a large number of results? How will the authors track the references identified from google scholar - especially when there are no options for downloading references and their abstracts?

Given the anticipated difficulty with conducting the proposed review, and without adequate justification, including grey literature is not currently recommended.

X. Selection process

After searching and importing the references to Endnote (not sure what systematic review software the authors plan to use) - what will the authors do with references that have no abstract. Will they be automatically screened in Phase 2?

XI. Data collection

In some sections of the paper the authors seem to confuse types of data. For example, in the abstract it says, "A systematic review of qualitative data will be performed using narrative synthesis". This sentence and the ideas behind it need clarification and revision. For studies that meet the inclusion criteria, data analysis of qualitative results will be conducted using narrative synthesis. Reference to raw qualitative data and qualitative findings reported in relevant publications are not clearly distinguished.

Note - authors refer to Researcher 2 and Researcher 2. I believe this should be Reviewer 2 and Reviewer 1.

XII. Data synthesis

The authors state that they will explore "health professionals' experiences and attitudes of managing disclosure of domestic violence and sexual assault". From the information presented, these are not effectiveness or implementation studies. As a result, it is unclear why the authors use terms such as "outcome measures".

When discussing the four phases of narrative synthesis, under "Theory development" the authors state, "The reviewers will describe a set of causal assumptions which contribute to the outcome of the intervention". In this case, what is the intervention and what are the outcomes? This language lacks clarity in the context of the review that is being proposed. In addition, from the
data extraction that is planned, it is unlikely that the authors will have enough information to test the theory that they have proposed. Is it feasible to answer a question that is so specific?

XIII. Declarations

Please review information related to Ethics, Funding, and Author's Contributions (e.g. only on author is discussed here).

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