Reviewer’s report

Title: A decision tool to help researchers make decisions about including systematic reviews in overviews of reviews of healthcare interventions

Version: 0 Date: 04 Feb 2018

Reviewer: Beate Wieseler

Reviewer’s report:

General remarks

The authors describe the development of a decision tool for inclusion of SRs in overviews of SRs. Given the relevance of overviews and the challenges of conducting this type of studies, the suggestion and discussion of the decision tool is an important contribution.

The approach in principle seems appropriate and helpful to understand and describe consequences of various decision pathways. However, because the results from the case study on which the development was based are not available for the review of the manuscript, the conclusions drawn from the case study cannot be evaluated.

Abstract, page 2 lines 10-15

The methods section of the abstract is difficult to understand. It might be helpful to clarify what is meant by "inclusion decisions".

Methods, page 5 lines 6-13

The decision tool described in the manuscript was developed based on a case study which is presented in a different manuscript. From the information provided in the manuscript, it is not possible to evaluate if the conclusions drawn from the case study are appropriate.

Methods, page 5 lines 14-15

The authors examined the impact of the inclusion decisions on the overviews' comprehensiveness, results and challenges of preparing the overview. It is unclear, if the overviews' quality was also considered and which quality criteria were used. Please clarify. If the development of the decision tool did not consider the overviews' quality, please discuss the consequences.

Results, page 8, lines 15-19, Table 1
The authors summarize the impact of the different inclusion scenarios on the comprehensiveness and complexity of the overviews and reference the companion paper for details. However, Table 1 describing the impact of inclusion scenarios is rather general and is only stating if a specific scenario was more or less comprehensive or more or less challenging. The reader should be able to understand from the Table why a certain scenario was considered more or less comprehensive or challenging. From my point of view this should at least at a summary level become clear from this manuscript. The reader should not be required to read the companion paper to get an idea about the comprehensiveness and challenges of the different scenarios. Please extent Table 1 accordingly.

Figure 1

It might be helpful for the reader to link the final alternative scenarios in Figure 1 to the names of the scenarios from Table 1 (e.g. "first restricted scenario" for "include only Cochrane SRs").

Discussion, page 13, lines 1-2

Another possible advantage of working with the tool might be an increased transparency of the decision process and its possible consequences (if linked to reporting of the overview). This is mentioned in the conclusion but should also be added at this point of the discussion.

Discussion, Page 11, lines 7 - 13

While it is correct that recency and quality of a SR might be operationalised in different ways, it would be helpful if the authors would suggest definitions that work with their decision pathway, e.g. define recency based on the search date.

Discussion page 14, lines 2-5

Please include a few examples of shared characteristics of the overviews in the case study (e.g. that all were on interventions in paediatrics).

Discussion

Please discuss if and how the tool could react to an increasing number of possibly conflicted SRs (Ioannidis, The Mass Production of Redundant, Misleading, and Conflicted Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses. Milbank Q. 2016 Sep;94(3):485-514. doi: 10.1111/1468-0009.12210.)

Level of interest

Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:
An article of importance in its field that should be highlighted to relevant networks

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

Declaration of competing interests
Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

1. Have you in the past five years received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

2. Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

3. Do you hold or are you currently applying for any patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

4. Have you received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organisation that holds or has applied for patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

5. Do you have any other financial competing interests?

6. Do you have any non-financial competing interests in relation to this paper?

If you can answer no to all of the above, write 'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.

I declare that I have no competing interests.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal. I understand that my name will be included on my report to the authors and, if the manuscript is accepted for publication, my named report including any attachments I upload will be posted on the website along with the authors' responses. I agree for my report to be made available under an Open Access Creative Commons CC-BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). I understand that any comments which I do not wish to be included in my named report can be included as confidential comments to the editors, which will not be published.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal.