Author’s response to reviews

Title: Stakeholder involvement in systematic reviews: a scoping review

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Author’s response to reviews:

Thank you for your comments on our paper. Below we list each comment, and our response to each point.

Reviewer #1: Thanks for the invitation to review the study: “Stakeholder involvement in systematic reviews: a scoping review.” This scoping review focused on a comprehensive description of different kinds of stakeholder involvement in systematic reviews, considering several variables regarding the systematic review. I found the paper rigorously done, the appendices help to improve the transparency of the research process, and the bibliography is appropriated.

I have only five commentaries
1. In the abstract. The methods section is not clear when explaining the titles screening, specifically when you say: "Titles and abstracts were screened by 1 author, after determining agreement between authors was >95%" In the methods section of the manuscript I understood what you are talking about, but not in the abstract. I think should consider a change of wording here.

RESPONSE: We have replaced this sentence.

2. I found unnecessary to present always the proportions in the format (%, #/N) You can provide only the percentage and clarify your N at the beginning of the paragraph.

RESPONSE: As requested we have edited to leave the percentage only, ensuring that the N is clear.

3. The search strategy. I was not able to understand why you began with a narrow search (between 2014-2016) and then moved to 2010-2013, but you argue that majority of papers were between 2014-2015. It is possible that if this issue is not clear to me, maybe is not clear for the readers as well.

RESPONSE: We have added in some further clarification of the aims of each of the steps of the searches into this paragraph.

4. In the selection criteria section, you say: "We excluded titles without abstracts, and review protocols; this was a pragmatic decision made in light of the high volume of search results." I understand the criteria, but you should discuss if this can imply any kind of publication bias in your scoping review.

RESPONSE: We have added a sentence discussing this point to the first paragraph of the Limitations section.

5. Finally, regarding the focus of the review section. I recommend providing further clarification when you say: "Most frequently (10%, 29/291) this was 'factors influencing health status and contact with health services', where reviews covered topics such as the effectiveness or implementation of care pathways for specific population (e.g. paediatrics, geriatrics, emergency care)." I found that a description of the kind of issues focused on those systematic reviews might be interesting for the readers. More than the ICD 10 categories, information about if the focus of the systematic review is for example interventions (e.g.,
clinical, surgical, public health), a diagnostic test, PROs, strategies of healthcare delivery, educational interventions, risk factor assessment, etc., would be more fruitful.

RESPONSE: We do not feel that we have the words/space available to enable us to have a longer description of these issues. However, in order to enable readers to see what type of issues the systematic reviews focussed on, we have added an additional column to the Table of included studies (Additional File 7) providing all our ICD-10 categorisations. This will enable readers to explore the topics covered further if they wish.

Reviewer #2: The paper is a very relevant topic, which is relevant to the Journal audience and potential authors/researchers.

The methods used for the scoping review were appropriate for the research question and aim, and was linked to other wider pieces of work off the back of the scoping review.

Management of papers:

The search strategy was comprehensive, but it was not clear why different dates were applied for different databases. Comprehensive and proactive searching methods applied, appropriate to the methodology.

RESPONSE: As per Reviewer #1 comment on this; we have added clarification of our aims for each of the steps of the search.

Clear and appropriate inclusion criteria were used.

Quality assessment was using their own (stated) ratings of green, amber or red (line 215-223). While these were clear and relevant, it was not clear if any work had been done to identify or use internationally recognised quality criteria e.g. GRADE type assessment or appraisal of quality assessment such as CASP. In absence of a recognised quality assessment tool being used, a statement should be included as to why the authors had to use their own criteria and if these criteria are in themselves a result of the paper or published protocol (which could potentially be used in future reviews) or are only relevant to this paper.

RESPONSE: We have added 2 sentences at the start of the section ‘Judgement of comprehensiveness of description’. These clarify why we assessed comprehensiveness, rather than quality.
There are no internationally recognised quality criteria for appraising stakeholder involvement in SRs, and we did not aim to appraise quality of involvement.

Assessing the quality of the methodological conduct of the systematic reviews that we included (for example by tools for assessing quality of systematic reviews, such as the ROBIS or AMSTAR) was not relevant to the aims of our study. We have clarified this further.

Results:

Only one author oversaw data extraction therefore there is the potential for bias to be introduced here, as the consequent findings were reliant on this data extraction. While practically this would have been the most straightforward way of completing this stage of the review it would be improved if the extraction was overseen by one or more others to ensure completeness and hence validity of the findings.

RESPONSE: We have added a sentence to the end of the first paragraph under Limitations, discussing the limitations of this.

Over half the papers included were reports or guidelines rather than systematic reviews, which in itself is an interesting finding on the type of prior research into the topic. Although the quality of most papers was low, there has been work on the topic in the published literature so it is a recognised area of interest. A summary statement as to why these papers (particularly the non-review papers) were not high quality would provide context and background on why this topic is producing low quality results, such as inconsistent definitions, difficulty assessing rational and impact or general uncertainly on when and how to engage stakeholders, would also strengthen this papers conclusions.

RESPONSE: We have added a new paragraph at the end of the limitation section, highlighting that our judgement was not one of quality, and specifically discussing the issue of the high number of papers relating to guidelines.

Almost a third of included papers did not state the stakeholder - this could have an affect on the results and the paper should be clear why these were still included as they could not be sure the stakeholders met the set definitions stated in the paper (line 164)

RESPONSE: No change – while the ‘type’ of stakeholder was not described in these papers, we did only include papers which clearly met our inclusion criteria – including our definition of stakeholder (as the definition was broad it was possible to be confident that a paper met this criteria without knowing the specific types of stakeholder).
No attempt was made to review or consider the effect of publication bias on the review findings.

RESPONSE: We have now added a sentence relating to publication bias into our limitations section.

Applicability and use:

The implications of this work (line 437) were clearly stated. One of the obvious implications of this scoping review is the consequent recommendation that the authors protocol (ref 19) is used in future systematic reviews. While appropriate, it would be worth strengthening this section of the paper to describe this (this would fit in the section which starts at line 483) as this protocol is mentioned in the introduction to the paper but needs referring to in these later sections also.

RESPONSE: No change - this protocol was a protocol for the METHODS of this systematic review, and not a protocol for how to involve stakeholders. Therefore we did not feel that it was appropriate to refer to it in later stages. We hope that people use this published papers to help them decide on their methods of stakeholder involvement.

Overall the research was well conducted and the material provided in the paper was clear, well presented and relevant to the journal and its audience. With minor amendments I conclude that this paper would be a good addition to the evidence base and could be used to inform future research.

RESPONSE: Thank you for this general comment.