Reviewer’s report

Title: Stakeholder involvement in systematic reviews: a scoping review

Version: 0 Date: 01 May 2018

Reviewer: Gemma Brinn

Reviewer's report:

The paper is a very relevant topic, which is relevant to BMC Public Health 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.

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.

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.
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 paper’s conclusions.

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)

No attempt was made to review or consider the effect of publication bias on the review findings.

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.

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.

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
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