Reviewer’s report

Title: The impact of income support systems on healthcare quality and functional capacity in workers with low back pain: a realist review protocol

Version: 1 Date: 25 Jan 2019

Reviewer: Claire Duddy

Reviewer's report:

Thanks to the authors for such extensive responses to my earlier comments on this manuscript. Some further comments on the revised version follow.

1. Thank you for adding more detail around the definition of the 'healthcare quality' outcome, which I think is a useful pointer for the reader as to what you will expect to find in relation to this outcome in the relevant literature. It is also useful to understand that the review will not focus on exploration of the link between healthcare quality and functional capacity, but I think you are selling yourselves short here, and this review does still have potential to shed light on this link via its theorising mechanisms with an "indirect" influence on functional capacity (as described in lines 152-3) (acknowledging that the extent to which it is able to do so will be limited by available data).

2. There are some minor grammatical errors in the new explanation of realist philosophy (lines 110-113), which I think are just hangovers from edits to the previous sentence structure.

3. I think these explanations have been improved, and appreciate the new distinction between policies and mechanisms in Figures 1 and 2. Although other "context" features are at the moment "unconfigured" (i.e. not linked to Ms and Os), I think this is fine at this stage. I am unsure about the use of the word "construct" to describe mechanisms in line 142. Although I think I understand your meaning, the assertion that mechanisms ARE "non-observable constructs" seems to carry an implication that mechanisms are not "real". I think you are drawing perhaps on Westhorp, who uses the term "construct" to describe the various ways in which "mechanisms" have been understood and applied in realist research.[1] Are you adopting one construct in particular, or another way of understanding "mechanism"?

4. The methods relating to searching are now much clearer. I am not sure what you mean in line 206-7 by "...will first be used to "snowball" search results". "Snowballing" usually refers to identifying additional relevant documents via following up citations in reference lists, and you mention this later (line 209) but it seems to be used in a different sense here. Could you clarify? (My apologies for not picking this up before). I'm pleased to see the inclusion of opinion pieces/letters etc.

5. Screening and data extraction processes are now much clearer. It might be helpful to include an example to help explain how the "relevance and rigour" criteria might work in practice. For example, how will authors adjudicate between "very", "moderately", and "less" relevant or rigourous? I would
recommend referring to [2] for discussion of these concepts and practical examples and advice on how they might be applied.

6. and 7. The processes and purpose of identifying policy documents and the interviews (along with the associated limitations of these approaches) are now much clearer.

A further very minor observation - in line 242, you are missing a reference to Table 1 ("are presented in…").

References


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