Reviewer’s report

Title: Memory of pain in adults. A protocol for systematic review and meta-analysis

Version: 0 Date: 04 Feb 2019

Reviewer: Victoria Madden

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for this opportunity to review this protocol for a study that could improve insight into the accuracy of the recall of pain. I believe the study question to be relevant. The protocol is largely well planned and clearly written with the exception of a few typing and grammatical errors that do not interfere with the message of the manuscript. I would suggest a few minor revisions be considered before publication.

Abstract

Line 29. I believe the term 'pain memory' can mean different things to people from different fields. I suggest using a term such as 'recall of pain' so as to be clear.

Background

This section is clear and relevant. I have the same comment as for the abstract.

Line 67, Aims. I am surprised that you have opted to restrict this review to adults. Is that because this work has been done (or is being done) for children, although I may not be aware of it? If there is no strong reason to exclude children, I suggest that it might be of interest to include children, but deal with their data separately. There are certainly interesting and insightful narrative reviews on this topic in children, and the data would be at least equally important as for adults - and perhaps more plentiful.

Methods

Line 78, Training session. I particularly appreciate the clarity with which this training has been described.

Line 95, Search terms and phrases. I am concerned that excluding studies that use the terms 'child', 'animal', 'rat', 'mouse' or 'mice' could lead to erroneous exclusion of studies that have
mentioned these terms in their abstracts, despite actually studying humans. Please consider maximising the sensitivity of your search by excluding these exclusions. Please also clarify whether your search will be restricted to title/abstract, keywords, or full text.

Line 118, Searching other resources. Please consider also screening the reference lists of relevant review articles identified in your search - especially if it is untenable to avoid excluding studies that have mentioned the 'child/animal terms' as suggested above. It strikes me that the pool of studies on this topic may be rather small, and it would be a pity to miss any eligible studies because of an insufficiently sensitive searching strategy.

Line 128. Please clarify that 'subjective assessment' refers to self-report (rather than somebody else's subjective report of what they believe to be the participant's pain), if that is indeed what you mean.

Line 129. I believe that 'the measurement of actual pain' should, strictly speaking, be 'the assessment of actual pain' or - even better 'the report of actual pain'. The (rather technical) distinction between measurement and assessment is that measurement is reserved for things that are directly measured (e.g. the circumference of an apple or the temperature of water), whereas latent variables cannot be measured.

Line 162, Risk of bias assessment tool. I am unable to comment on this tool because I have not been provided with the appendix showing the tool. Please provide this tool for the next round of review. In it, I would like to see some provision made for assessing the consistency of instructions across assessment time points.

Line 221, Further steps. Please commit to reporting all deviations from protocol in the main text of the manuscript that reports this systematic review (rather than in the appendix), so as to facilitate clarity for the readers. The deviations may, of course, be justified in the appendix.

General considerations

The influence of various factors on the accuracy of recall of pain has been mentioned, but this protocol does not describe any plan for how these factors are to be handled in the review. I realise that some flexibility may be required when you are actually faced with the data, but I think it would be worth acknowledging the need for this and suggesting some possible strategies in this protocol. For example, pain at the time of recall may be an influential factor that could be accounted for in a sensitivity analysis. There are also some reports that children's accuracy in recalling pain is influenced by the amount of distress they reported at the time of initial pain. If initial pain-related distress data are unavailable, perhaps initial pain intensity (as a very rough indicator of possible distress levels associated with that pain) could be factored into the analysis.
as a possible influence on accuracy. Trait anxiety has also been put forward as a possible influence in children.

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No