Author’s response to reviews

Title: Framework, principles and recommendations for utilising participatory methodologies in the co-creation and evaluation of public health interventions.

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Author’s response to reviews:

Dear Editor,

Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to resubmit another version of the manuscript.

We have pleased three out of four reviewers in our latest revision and are grateful to reviewer #2 for such taking time to review our manuscript again. We have tried our best to answer the reviewers comment. However, we feel we cannot include all the details that the reviewer requested, as we agree that some are not relevant and it would make the paper very lengthy and heavy going. Our main issues is that Reviewer #2 comments are mainly rhetorical and out of context.

Our main aim in this article is to increase robustness and systematic approach in the use of co-creation during the development of public health interventions. Co-creation is increasingly used in this context but currently there is no framework to ensure it is approached scientifically and
systematically. Although our paper and approach are not perfect, this is really the first to address the development of a framework. We think and are sure Reviewer#2 will agree that co-creation is in dire need of a framework like systematic reviews were some years ago.

Reviewer #2 main concern is whether our study is empirical or a review:

“of my most significant concerns, that of the position of this paper as an empirical study, rather than a review paper.”

In the context of addressing and developing a framework, we feel that this is an almost impossible rhetorical question to answer. Was the development of PICO by Cochrane empirical or a review? The development of guidelines, scientific framework and theory are always a mixture of empirical data and review of existing literature. We are not aware of a specific research design either empirical or based on literature review only that is directly suitable to developing research frameworks, for which a variety of evidence have to be synthesised.

Nonetheless, to make it very clear that this is not a review we have removed every mention of review or using pre-existing literature in the abstract and main body of the manuscript. This will also address reviewer #2 following questions:

“What published literature?
- If this is building on from published literature, why is this not a review?
- How has the published literature been integrated with the case studies?”

We agree that our method section could be more specific and transparent. Consequently to address Reviewer #2 request to frame it within a recognised methodology, we have rewritten the method section (please see lines 147-188). We describe in more detail the action research approach we have taken.

Reviewer #2 also queried:

- “How were the case studies selected, and why were they selected? Why these and not others? It seems that these are cases that involve the authors, but this is not mentioned specifically and yet it would influence how the authors have arrived at the principles outlined.”

We have specifically detailed the case study and how they were selected in the methods sections. This is a sample of convenience which is very usual in action research. Of course authors of each of the case studies were invited, however it should also be noted that some of the authorship
team were not directly involved in the case studies used within, thus widening the perspective we draw from. We have now also specified this in the methods section.

We are surprised at Reviewer#2 stance on reference 34. Yes, from a solely positivist point of view this type of research can be portrayed as “under-specified”, but in participatory research and public engagement in science such rigid positivist stance is rarely applicable. Reflection in action research is not “simple reflection” but actually a process involving writing and documentary analysis. There is an extensive literature on recursive reflection cycles. It is in fairness mostly in the qualitative research literature rather than the positivist literature.

What would reviewer #2 say about fantastic articles published in this journal such as “Facing Shadows: working with young people to coproduce a short film about depression” https://researchinvolvement.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s40900-018-0126-y which contain almost no scientific methods?

We believe our article will be highly cited considering the increased interest in using co-creation and the complete dearth of framework and guidance currently. We have chosen “Research Involvement and Engagement” because we want to contribute to bringing evidence to co-creation process and participatory research. Of course there are limitations to our principles, that we readily acknowledge, but yet they are the first to be drawn following a well-accepted scientific method.

We believe we have addressed all pertinent reviewers’ comments and we would be grateful if you could now consider publishing our article.

Best

The authorship team.