Reviewer’s report

Title: Reporting in the abstracts presented at the 5th AfriNEAD (African Network for Evidenceto- Action in Disability) Conference in Ghana

Version: 0 Date: 31 Jul 2018

Reviewer: Anke Rohwer

Reviewer's report:

This manuscript describes reporting of abstracts submitted to the AfriNEAD conference in 2017. The current manuscript needs substantial revisions to clarify a number of issues listed below.

The manuscript should be shortened considerably.

1. The study focused on conference abstracts. However, authors just refer to 'abstracts' in general, which seems to include abstracts of published papers. I think this is an important difference, as conference abstracts have some unique properties that need to be taken into consideration. For example, conference abstracts may report on studies that will not be published in scientific journals, hence the abstract will be the only published record of the study. I suggest that authors clarify this in the introduction and consider the unique properties of conference abstracts throughout.

2. The objectives of the study, "to examine the reporting gaps in abstracts presented at the 5th AfriNEAD conference in Ghana" are unclear. I am not sure that 'reporting gaps' is a commonly used term? I suggest to use 'gaps in reporting' or just to say that reporting of conference abstracts was assessed.

3. Furthermore, please rethink and rephrase the aim that findings are "expected to strengthen the reporting gaps in future conferences" (page 4, line16/17). Please also consider the limitations of a descriptive study like this one.

4. The authors report that they conducted a systematic review. However, they report a descriptive, cross-sectional study of abstracts presented at a conference - this is not a systematic review.

5. I suggest that authors clarify that they looked at how the abstracts were reported, not how the studies were conducted. These can be two very different aspects.

6. I suggest to add a description of the requirements of the conference - e.g. was there a word limit? Did the conference specify a certain structure?

7. It is not clear how they decided whether abstracts would be eligible or not, authors list the themes of the conference as inclusion criteria - would this not include all abstracts? Please clarify.
8. Similarly, the exclusion criteria seem to refer to abstracts that would not have been submitted to the conference (criteria 1). In addition, criteria 2 and 3 are unclear. Were abstracts only included if they were structured into background, methods, results, conclusion (see earlier comment about abstract requirements). I am not sure I understand criteria 3, as conference abstracts generally do not have a 'full text' attached to them. Does this refer to having a title only?

9. The framework used to evaluate the abstracts is not clear. Authors mention various reporting guidelines, however, only one of these specifically refers to abstracts (STROBE for abstracts). It is not clear how the reporting guidelines for full reports were used to extract data and I am not sure that these would be relevant? I think it is important to have a clear framework in the methods section that would represent the 'ideal' (gold standard) abstract for the conference.

10. In the methods section, authors report: "Extracted data also focused on the appropriateness, accuracy and coherence of information reported in the abstract to the research questions". It is not clear how the authors made judgement about these and I wonder whether this goes beyond information that can be presented in an abstract?

11. Authors use the term "full texts of abstract", which is confusing to the reader, as full-texts usually refer to the entire manuscript, not just the abstract.

12. In the results section, I think it would be useful to describe the abstracts in terms of the type of question they addressed (e.g. intervention, risk factor, experience, prevalence etc) and include more information on the population, setting, issue/intervention/exposure and outcome (i.e. the question the abstract addressed).

13. Linked to my comment on the framework used to extract data, the results section should follow this framework when reporting on the results of the study.

14. Throughout the manuscript, please check the use of "studies" and "abstracts". E.g. In the results section, line 43, authors report that "a total of 36 included studies..." this should be 'abstracts'. In line 48, authors report that "...half of the included abstracts were conducted in Ghana..." - does this relate to the country where the studies reported in the abstracts were conducted?

15. The text in the results section repeats most of the information that is presented in the tables. I suggest to summarise this and point out interesting results rather than repeating all results. Please avoid reporting redundant results i.e. when reporting how many abstracts reported on the sample size, there is no need to report how many did not report a sample size.

16. The subheading "Evidence mapping and identifying gaps in methods and results of abstracts" on page 7: I don't think 'evidence mapping' is the correct term to use here, as this is not what was done. The same comment applies to the subheading on page 8.
17. On page 8, lines 39-48: I am not sure what the authors want to report here. What does "The majority of the included abstracts… were not applicable to established association" mean? Similarly, authors report that "most abstracts were applicable to report on the impact of the study…” Please clarify

18. Page 8, subheading: "Reporting the effectiveness of methods and results reported in abstracts" - what is meant by 'effectiveness of methods and results'

19. Please check the numbering of tables and figures in the text. These are not always consecutive.

20. Although the flowchart is useful, this was not a review and there was no synthesis of results. This is a descriptive study.

21. I don't think Figure 2, 3, 4 and 5 add any value and I would remove these.

22. Table 1: Please add percentages and the total number of abstracts assessed. Check the use of abstracts/studies. As per my earlier comment, please don't add redundant results.

23. Table 2: It is not clear what the numbers in the table refer to. The heading refers to 'reporting gaps'. Do the numbers refer to abstracts that did report on the study design, methods etc. or that did not? Under 'type of quantitative data', what is 'HP Scanjet G24410 scanner connected to laptop'? Should this category be called: Methods of data collection?

24. Table 3: As per my previous comments, please do not include the number of abstracts that reported and the number of abstracts that did not report on a specific issue

25. Table 4: See previous comment on 'effectiveness of methods and results' - what does this mean and how were judgements made about this?

26. Table 5: Should this be an additional table rather than a table within the manuscript? Please clarify the columns 'Suitable design', 'Suitable methods', 'Suitable sampling', 'Suitable data collection', 'Data analysis suitable' - this is not what was reported, but judgements that the author team made? How were these made?

27. Table 6: Data extraction form - Should this be an additional file?

28. In the discussion, authors mention that they contacted authors for missing data - this is not reported in the methods section

29. The discussion is too long and mainly summarises the results. It would be good to have the authors' views on e.g. Why it is important to have well reported conference abstracts? What happens at other conferences, is there other literature? Is this limited to the field of disabilities? What are the implications of your findings?
30. Authors need to highlight the added value of the study. It is very difficult to understand the bottom-line, the "so what?" of the study.

31. The conclusion is another summary of the findings and are very vague - what is the main conclusion?

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Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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