11.2.2 Developing the title and question

Title of the scoping review protocol

The title of the protocol (and the subsequent review) should be informative and give a clear indication of the topic of the scoping review. It is recommended that the title should always include the phrase “…: a scoping review” to allow easy identification of the type of document it represents. Correspondingly, protocols should also be identified as such. Titles should not be phrased as questions. This is a simple example of a scoping review protocol title by Kao et al. 2017a:

“Pediatric tonsillectomy quality of life assessment instruments: a scoping review protocol”

A range of mnemonics for different types of review (and research) questions have been suggested. The “PCC” mnemonic is recommended as a guide to construct a clear and meaningful title for a scoping review. The PCC mnemonic stands for the Population, Concept, and Context. There is no need for explicit outcomes, interventions or phenomena of interest to be stated for a scoping review; however elements of each of these may be implicit in the concept under examination.

The title of the protocol (and subsequent review) should be structured to reflect the core elements of the PCC. Using the PCC mnemonic helps to construct a title that provides potential readers with important information about the focus and scope of the review, and its applicability to their needs. For example, if the review aims to map a range of quality of life instruments (concept) for pediatric patients (population) (Kao et al. 2017a) this should be stated in the title. Including the context in the title (if the context is a central focus of the review) can further help readers to position the review when they are searching for evidence related to their own particular information and/or decision-making needs.

As discussed in further depth below, there should be congruence between the title, review question/s, and inclusion criteria.

Scoping review question(s)

The scoping review question guides and directs the development of the specific inclusion criteria for the scoping review. Clarity of the review question assists in developing the protocol, facilitates effectiveness in the literature search, and provides a clear structure for the development of the scoping review. As with the title, the question should incorporate the PCC elements. A scoping review will generally have one primary question, e.g.

“What quality of life questionnaires are available for pediatric patients following tonsillectomies with or without adenoidectomies for chronic infections or sleep disordered breathing?”

If that question sufficiently addresses the PCC and adequately corresponds with the objective of the review, sub-questions will not be needed. However, some scoping review questions benefit from one or more sub-questions that delve into particular attributes of Context, Population or Concept. Sub-questions can be useful in outlining how the evidence is likely to be mapped. For example, the primary question above relates to the types of quality of life questionnaires; however, the further sub-questions could be posed to delve into potential particular issues relating to other important details, such as the population (or participants) of interest. For example:

“What are the ages of the pediatric patients where quality of life questionnaires have been or could be used within the sources of evidence identified for the primary review question?”

Likewise, a sub-question may help to justify mapping the evidence by context, e.g.

“In what geographical (i.e. countries) and clinical (i.e. primary care, acute care, etc.) contexts have the quality of life instruments included for the primary review question been used?”