

Peer Review

Review of: "Protocol: A Systematic Review of Multi-Sectoral Coordination during the COVID-19 Pandemic—Practices, Challenges, and Recommendations for Future Preparedness"

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This manuscript presents a well-written and important research protocol addressing multi-sectoral coordination during the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors demonstrate a solid rationale for the study, emphasizing the relevance of examining coordination mechanisms in pandemic preparedness. The study's objectives are clearly defined, specific, and consistent with public health concerns, even though they may not directly reflect the immediate priorities of the current moment. The authors also propose a robust framework for risk of bias assessments to strengthen the validity of their findings. Furthermore, the focus on Low- and Middle-Income Countries adds significant value, as it is an underrepresented area in COVID-19 coordination literature.

While the manuscript demonstrates considerable strengths, there are several areas that need refinement before it can be considered for publication. Most importantly, I believe that the methods section requires further development to ensure the study's reproducibility, particularly given that this is a research protocol. Below, I provide specific feedback and suggestions for improvement:

1. The authors mention the inclusion of "reputable gray literature, such as government reports and WHO documents." However, this is quite vague, and more detail is needed on how this will be executed. The search mechanisms and selection criteria for gray literature should be outlined more clearly. It would also be useful to clarify which government documents will be included – are these

national, regional, or local-level reports, and from which countries, states, or jurisdictions? A more explicit description of how the inclusion of gray literature will be handled is essential for ensuring transparency and reproducibility.

2. In the "Search Strategy" section, the authors state, "for example," regarding their search strategy, but a detailed and comprehensive strategy should be provided instead. This should include the exact search terms, date restrictions, and database-specific search tactics, as well as any adjustments made to account for database variations. Clear guidance on the search process will improve the transparency of the methodology and enhance the reproducibility of the study.

3. In the "Data Management" section, the authors plan to use Excel and EndNote. While these tools are commonly used, they may not be the most appropriate or efficient for conducting meta-analyses, especially with potentially large volumes of data. I recommend that the authors consider alternative software tools specifically designed for systematic reviews and meta-analyses to streamline the process and ensure greater accuracy in handling quantitative data. This improvement would enhance both the rigor and reproducibility of the analysis.

4. The manuscript proposes including studies with various study designs and methodologies. While this broad inclusion is commendable, it also introduces significant complexity in the data synthesis process. The authors should further elaborate on how they plan to address this challenge, particularly regarding the feasibility of conducting a meta-analysis instead of solely a literature review. It would be helpful to clarify the approach to synthesizing heterogeneous data - whether they plan to conduct subgroup analyses or use alternative methods to combine diverse study designs, such as mixed-methods analysis.

Conclusion:

Overall, this is a promising and timely research protocol that addresses an important topic. However, to enhance the reproducibility and rigor of the study, I recommend that the authors provide a more detailed method. Addressing this point will improve the transparency and reproducibility of the methodology and strengthen the manuscript. Once these revisions are made, I believe the protocol has the potential to make a valuable contribution to the field.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.