

Reviews of Evidence

**WHO-SEARO REGION
RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMME
on
STRENGTHENING GENDER EQUITY AND INTERSECTIONALITY IN HEALTH POLICY
AND SYSTEMS RESEARCH**

What is it?

An overview of research on a topic, describing the characteristics of the existing body of knowledge.

What it does/Characteristics

- Typically specific but can also be wide in scope
- Can include various types of literature
- Does not typically assess the quality of each study but critiques the overall body of work
- Analysis is largely descriptive but may be thematic, chronological or conceptual
- Identifies research/knowledge gaps

Methodology/Approach

- Data extraction period is not time bound
- Is not an exhaustive search
- Does not specify a process of gathering studies that is reproducible

Typical uses

- Chapter in a dissertation
- Background section of a research proposal

What is it?

An assessment of the scope and coverage of a body of literature on a topic that maps the conceptual/empirical evidence.

What it does/Characteristics

- Indicates the volume of available studies
- Identifies types of available evidence
- Clarifies how research is conducted on the topic
- Describes the focus of the body of work
- Identifies/clarifies concepts and definitions related to the topic
- Analyses knowledge gaps
- Captures opportunities for evidence syntheses and can inform planning of a systematic review

Methodology/Approach

- Uses a defined search strategy (databases, screening, selection)
- Clearly explains how analysis was done

Typical uses

- Emerging areas of evidence
- When the topic the topic is heterogenous and complex

What is it?

An unbiased, exhaustive and systematic summary of the best research to answer a specific question, typically to inform practice.

What it does/Characteristics

- Seeks to eliminate bias in the process
- Identifies and accounts for bias in the evidence by evaluating methodological limitations of studies
- Collates and synthesises evidence from a relatively small number of studies
- Best suited for quantitative studies
- (Usually) requires multiple people
- Provides clear implications for practice and/or directs further research

Methodology/Approach

- Must have a clear protocol which includes an explicit, transparent, peer reviewed search strategy
- Requires critical appraisal/a risk of bias assessment
- Provides a synthesis of findings from individual studies and a summary of findings

Typical uses

- Clarifying conflicting evidence on clinical practice

What is it?

A statistical technique that combines the results of quantitative studies to provide a more accurate picture of the results.

What it does/Characteristics

- May be conducted independently or following a systematic review of quantitative studies
- Requires studies to be relatively similar for comparability

Methodology/Approach

- Study selection and screening
- Weighting studies based on sample size and robustness
- Checking for publication bias (Funnel plots)
- Pooling data and results
- Provide a true picture of intervention effect (Forest plots)
- Provide a single effect estimate

Typical uses

- Assessing the strength of evidence on interventions, drugs, treatments for guideline development/revision

What is it?

An analytical, evaluative and/or interpretive process of combining the findings of qualitative studies to broaden/deepen understanding on a subject.

What it does/Characteristics

- Critically evaluates the quality of studies for their contribution
- Identifies themes/constructs across studies
- Works towards a level of abstraction rather than summation
- Works toward a larger narrative/new theory

Methodology/Approach

- 40-50 methods - meta-ethnography, critical interpretative synthesis, framework analysis
- Translation -> interpretive/transformative approaches
- Methodology will depend on type of available data, time-frame and expertise

Typical uses

- Acceptability, feasibility of interventions

What is it?

A methodical way of producing succinct evidence summaries for action in a short timeframe (or a streamlined, expedited systematic review)

What it does/Characteristics

- Requires a clear question and defined context
- Requires greater consultation with knowledge users through the process
- Typical timeframe 1 month< to 6 months
- Knowledge users are usually policymakers, healthcare institutions, patient/provider associations

Methodology/Approach

- Specific research question
- Systematic literature search
- Quality assessment vs. exhaustiveness
- Vulnerable to bias
- Less certainty and generalisability of results

Typical uses

- Health system planning and policy development
- Efficacy and effectiveness studies
- Topics of clinical urgency or demands for uptake of technology

Mixed-methods review

A way of bringing together findings from quantitative studies and qualitative studies on a specific subject or question to provide a more holistic and nuanced picture/answer a more complex question.

Theoretical literature review

“focuses on a pool of theory that has accumulated in regard to an issue, concept, theory, phenomena. Theoretical literature reviews play an instrumental role in establishing what theories already exist, the relationships between them, to what degree the existing theories have been investigated, and to develop new hypotheses to be tested.”

Conceptual review

“groups articles according to concepts, or categories, or themes. It identifies the current 'understanding' of the given research topic, discusses how this understanding was reached, and attempts to determine whether a greater understanding can be suggested. It provides a snapshot of where things are with this particular field of research.”

See more in Grant, M. J. and Booth, A. (2009), A typology of reviews: an analysis of 14 review types and associated methodologies.

Name an appropriate type of review for the research question
Topic: Treatment for maternal anaemia

Is intravenous iron more effective than iron injections to reduce maternal anaemia?

Systematic review or rapid review

What determines pregnant women's preferences related to iron treatment?

Qualitative evidence synthesis

What do we know about intravenous iron treatment in pregnancy in LMIC settings?

Scoping review

How much more effective is intravenous iron vs. iron injections in reducing maternal anaemia?

Meta-analysis

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