

1. BREADTH AND DEPTH OF EACH STAGE OF A REVIEW?

- How broad or narrow is the review question?
- How broadly is it being addressed in this review?
- What time and other resources are available for the review?

Breadth of stages of a review

- i) Question: broad or narrow topic and evidence sources and inclusion criteria
- ii) Searching: exhaustive or saturation or purposive (or scoping in pilot reviews);
- iii) Map of research: analytic or descriptive
- iv) Synthesis: broad or narrow
- v) Extent of evidence: adequate to review or minimal
- vi) Synthesis: synthetic or descriptive

2. BREADTH AND DEPTH EXAMPLES

- Common breadth and depth choices and multi stage and mixed method reviews

There are an infinite number of possible combinations of breadth and depth in reviews. For example:

i) Limited search scoping map: overview of research undertaken on a (constrained) topic;



ii) Full analytic map: rich analysis of the research undertaken on a topic;

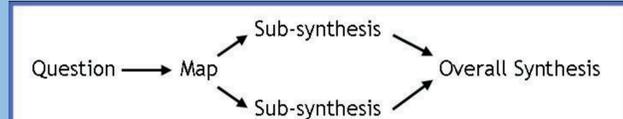
iii) Limited search scoping map and synthesis (Systematic Rapid Evidence Assessment): overview of the research undertaken on a (constrained) topic and the evidence it provides in answering the review question;



iv) Full systematic review (map and synthesis): full overview of research undertaken on a topic

and the evidence it provides in answering the review question. A two stage review is when consideration is given at the map stage to change the in-depth review (e.g. narrow the criteria to review only part of the map);

v) Multi arm systematic (mixed methods) review: with two sub-questions addressing different types of evidence with two sub-syntheses leading to an overall synthesis²;



vi) Reviews of reviews: Data is provided by other reviews rather than primary studies

3. BROAD AND NARROW EVIDENCE TYPES

- Reviews vary in the breadth of types of evidence considered

Syntheses address review questions by considering the sum of the evidence included and this may be of one or many types:

- i) Broad or narrow range of evidence types: a narrow range may be one type of research design or one type of practice knowledge; a broad range might be many types of research design or broad range of policy, practice, user analytic and opinion evidence
- ii) Focus on new primary data, completed primary studies, or secondary research (such as review of reviews) or a mixtures of all these.
- iii) Broad or narrow evidence sources. For example: published or unpublished reports.

Reviews using broad evidence types may manage this diversity by

- (a) using methods of quality assessment and synthesis that can manage various research designs³;
- (b) using two stage reviews with broad maps including many evidence types then fewer types of evidence in the synthesis;
- (c) dividing the review into sub-questions focusing on different types of evidence in multi arm mixed method reviews²;
- (d) iterative reviews that may not pre specify evidence types.

REFERENCES

- Gough D (2007) Dimensions of difference in evidence reviews (Overview; I. Questions, evidence and methods; II..Breadth and depth; III. Methodological approaches; IV. Quality and relevance appraisal; V. Communication, interpretation and application. Series of six posters presented at National Centre for Research Methods meeting, Manchester, January 2007. London: EPPI-Centre.
- Harden A, Thomas J (2005) Methodological issues in combining diverse study types in systematic reviews. *International Journal of Social Research Methods* 8:257-271
- Gough D (In press) Weight of evidence : a framework for the appraisal of the quality and relevance of evidence In J. Furlong, A. Oancea (Eds.) *Applied and Practice-based Research. Special Edition of Research Papers in Education*, Summer 2007.