

Issues to consider when including qualitative evidence

Cochrane Methods Symposium: Developing robust review protocols with increasingly diverse evidence

Angela Harden, Co-Convenor, QIMG

Trusted evidence.
Informed decisions.
Better health.

Weds 5th February, 2020





Cochrane Methods
Qualitative and
Implementation

Declaration of interest

I am a co-convenor of the Cochrane Qualitative and Implementation Methods Group;

I have received funding to conduct systematic reviews and methodological research on including qualitative research in systematic reviews;

I conduct primary qualitative research and randomised controlled trials on social interventions to promote health.



Qualitative evidence and diversity

A synthesis of qualitative evidence can:

- provide an opportunity for the views of diverse people in different contexts with varying access to care and resources to be heard.
- be used to understand what people thought of the intervention, how it worked for them in their context, how it was implemented and whether things need to change
- help assess if interventions are harmful or have unintended consequences for specific people in specific contexts.
- help determine how health systems with varying access to resources respond and adapt when an intervention is implemented.





Cochrane Methods

Qualitative and
Implementation

Qualitative
Evidence
Synthesis

The process by which individual studies addressing issues of context, process and experience are identified, brought together and combined into a whole to produce new or enhanced understanding



Chapter 21: Qualitative evidence

Jane Noyes, Andrew Booth, Margaret Cargo, Kate Flemming, Angela Harden, Janet Harris, Ruth Garside, Karin Hannes, Tomás Pantoja, James Thomas

Key Points:

- A qualitative evidence synthesis (commonly referred to as QES) can add value by providing decision makers with additional evidence to improve understanding of intervention complexity, contextual variations, implementation, and stakeholder preferences and experiences.
- A qualitative evidence synthesis can be undertaken and integrated with a corresponding intervention review; or
- Undertaken using a mixed-method design that integrates a qualitative evidence synthesis with an intervention review in a single protocol.
- Methods for qualitative evidence synthesis are complex and continue to develop. Authors should always consult current methods guidance at methods.cochrane.org/qi.

Cite this chapter as: Noyes J, Booth A, Cargo M, Flemming K, Harden A, Harris J, Garside R, Hannes K, Pantoja T, Thomas J. Chapter 21: Qualitative evidence. In: Higgins JPT, Thomas J, Chandler J, Cumpston M, Li T, Page MJ, Welch VA (editors). *Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions* version 6.0 (updated July 2019). Cochrane, 2019. Available from www.training.cochrane.org/handbook.

<i>Area of planning</i>	<i>Planning tools</i>	<i>Examples of issues to consider/ dilemmas</i>
Question development and review scope	RETREAT framework PerSPecTIF	Tension between narrow and broader focus esp. when looking at the ‘how’
Searching for studies	7S framework	Filter or no filter? Qualitative research can be ‘hidden’
Assessing methodological strengths and limitations	Risk to rigour approach Validated tools available	Appropriateness of sensitivity analysis
Selecting studies for synthesis	Some guidance available	All studies or a sample?
Extracting data	Web-based tools for management	‘Finding the findings’ Themes, concepts, metaphors,

<i>Area of planning</i>	<i>Planning tools</i>	<i>Examples of issues to consider/ dilemmas</i>
Method of synthesis	Chapter 21 (Thematic^{***}, Framework^{**}, Meta- ethnography[*])	Excludes realist and more interpretive methods
Assessing confidence in synthesized findings	CERQual	Relevance, methodological limitations, adequacy and coherence
Integrating with the intervention review	Matrix to facilitate comparison Analysing programme theory or logic Qualitative comparison analysis	Transcending qualitative and quantitative boundaries
Reporting the protocol	Generic (e.g. ENTREQ) or specific (e.g. eMERGE) reporting guidelines	Useful starting point for planning whole review

Conclusion

- Well developed and tested planning tools are available for qualitative evidence synthesis (QES)
- Form the basis for refinements to current standards in reporting of review protocols
- We need to assess how well we are doing as more Cochrane QES reviews and protocols are published

