

Scoping Reviews

Scoping reviews, like systematic reviews (see Resource), are a type of secondary research material that synthesises evidence by bringing together information from different sources on a particular topic. This is done in a rigorous and systematic way to ensure reliability. In contrast to systematic reviews however, scoping reviews address a broad research question, and are exploratory in their approach. For example, a systematic review may ask the specific question “Does intervention A improve specified outcomes of a particular population?” On the other hand, a scoping review could ask a broader question “What is the nature of the evidence for intervention A?”. Table 1 outlines some key differences between systematic reviews and scoping reviews.

Table 1: Key differences between systematic reviews and scoping reviews.

Systematic review:	Scoping review
Has a focused research question with narrow parameters.	Often has a broad research question.
Eligibility criteria (inclusion/ exclusion criteria) is defined right at the beginning	Eligibility criteria can be developed post hoc
Has detailed data extraction	May or may not involve data extraction
A quantitative synthesis is often performed	The synthesis more qualitative, and typically, not quantitative
Formally assesses the quality of studies and generates a conclusion relating to the focused research question	Often used to identify parameters and gaps in a body of literature

Indicators for conducting a scoping review

There are several reasons why scoping reviews may be conducted. A scoping review may be conducted to:

- Identify the types of evidence available in a particular field. In this case, a scoping review assesses the extent (size), range (variety), and nature (characteristics) of the available evidence that informs practice in the field. Particularly, the scoping review assists in examining emerging evidence when a particular topic has not been reviewed comprehensively or is too complex, unclear, and varied.
- Identify and analyse knowledge gaps. In examining available evidence on a particular topic, existing knowledge gaps are identified and analysed. This guides future research to address these gaps.
- Precursor to a systematic review. The results of a scoping review can provide information that will be a foundation for a systematic review. They can help researchers to refine their research questions. Furthermore, the researchers can survey the availability of evidence, and estimate the time it will take to complete a systematic review. Therefore, true to their name, scoping reviews



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are a suitable tool to determine the scope of literature available on a particular topic.

- Clarify key concepts or definitions in the literature. A scoping review may examine how different concepts or definitions available in the literature have been defined, understood, and classified. It may further clarify these concepts and (or) definitions.
- Examine how research is conducted on a particular topic or field. This includes assessing methodological designs of different primary studies; evaluating how the studies had been conducted, how the data had been reported and further determining whether methods applied are similar enough to compare across studies.
- Identify key characteristics or factors related to a concept. Key characteristics or factors related to a particular concept are identified through data extraction, and are grouped accordingly

What is the general process of conducting scoping reviews?

Step 1	Define the research question or research topic
Step 2	Develop a protocol (plan or methodology) for your review. This includes the inclusion/exclusion criteria, screening process and charting process. The protocol may change overtime and must be updated.
Step 3	Apply the Population (or participants)/Concept/Context (PCC) framework, recommended by the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) to identify the main concepts. The framework will inform your search strategy.
Step 4	Conduct searches for relevant studies (including grey literature).
Step 5	Screen results according to the inclusion/exclusion criteria.
Step 5	Extract & chart relevant data from the included studies.
Step 6	Write up the evidence to answer your question.

How do I report my findings?

The [PRISMA-ScR checklist](#) provides guidance on how to report and structure scoping reviews.

Key notes on scoping reviews:

Timeframe: It can take the same amount of time as the systematic review or even longer (12+ months). This also depends on several factors such as the availability of resources, quality and quantity of literature, screening process and experience of the review team.

Sources and searches: Due to broad research questions asked by scoping reviews, literature search strategies are less specific than in systematic reviews. Searches therefore produce literature that requires further screening and multiple sorting for relevance.

Selection: Selection of literature may or may not be based on an inclusion/exclusion criterion. An inclusion/exclusion however helps since a large volume of results may be produced from the broad searches and a substantial amount of time may be spent screening and selecting articles. [Covidence](#) can also help you screen, select, and manage your literature.



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Appraisal: Scoping reviews provide descriptive overviews of information. Therefore, critical appraisal of literature and risk of bias assessment are optional.

Synthesis: A formal synthesis of findings from individual studies and a summary of findings (SOF) table is not required. Reported results may include a logical diagram or table or any descriptive form that aligns with the scope and objectives of the review. The [PRISMA-ScR checklist](#) provides more guidance on this.

References

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