

# Systematic Reviews in Nursing: Healthy Diversity or Complete Confusion?

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# Objectives

By the end of this session, the learner will be able to:

1. Discuss how we might obtain clarity in the way literature reviews are described
2. Recognize the 2 main concepts involved in the undertaking of a Focused Mapping Review and Synthesis
3. Identify 3 terms are used in the literature to describe reviews
4. Describe 3-4 different methods used to undertake literature review



# The original systematic review; or systematic review with meta-analysis

# Background

- Following on from Cochrane methods for doing a systematic review, there has been the emergence of many different methods for doing qualitative and mixed methods reviews

# Sample of approaches to doing a literature review

Meta-aggregation: Hannes and Lockwood (2011). Comprehensive search, appraisal and aggregation of findings

Meta-ethnography: Noblit and Hare (1988). Purposive search, appraisal & interpretation of findings. 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> order interpretations

Thematic synthesis: Thomas and Harden (2008). Conceptual saturation, appraisal & interpretation of findings

Meta-synthesis: Walsh and Downe (2005). Comprehensive search, appraisal & interpretation of findings

Integrative review: Whitemore and Knafl (2005). Comprehensive search, appraisal & interpretation of findings

Meta-analysis: Higgins and Green (2011)

## Varied use of terminology

- Sabatino L, Stievano A, Rocco G, Kallio H, Pietila A, KAngasniemi M (2014) The dignity of the nursing profession: a **meta-synthesis** of qualitative research. *Nursing Ethics*, 2(6) 659-672.
  - In this paper, they refer to Noblit and Hare's **meta-ethnography**, rather than meta-synthesis
- Laging B, Ford R, Bauer M (2015) A **meta-synthesis** of factors influencing nursing home staff decisions to transfer residents to hospital. *JAN*, 71(10) 2224-2236.
  - In this paper, they refer to Hannes and Lockwood's **meta-aggregation**

# Methods

- Focused Mapping Review and Synthesis (FMRS)
  1. Focuses on identifying trends rather than a body of evidence
  2. Creates a descriptive map or topography rather than synthesis of evidence
  3. Overall approach to knowledge approach rather than state of the evidence
  4. Examines this within a broader epistemological context  
(Bradbury-Jones et al, 2019)



## Focused Mapping Review and Synthesis (FMRS)

- FMRS undertaken by Aveyard & Bradbury-Jones (2019)
- We reviewed the top 6 nursing journals from January 2017 to April 2018
- Inclusion criteria: any paper with “review” or “synthesis” in the title
- We reviewed the papers for stated method used, search strategy, critical appraisal, method of analysis

# Results

- We found 35 named approaches to doing a literature review (Aveyard & Bradbury-Jones, 2019)
- Most common: systematic review (but this did not refer to SR with meta-analysis) and integrative review
- Other methods: critical literature review, qualitative evidence synthesis, umbrella systematic review, critical synthesis, meta-narrative review, mixed method review, narrative review, scoping review, realist review, meta aggregation, theoretical review, systematic review of qualitative and quantitative methods, overview of systematic review, meta synthesis

# Results

- Not consistently indexed in journals
- For example, one journal has two sections:
  - Literature review
  - Systematic review
- Integrative reviews were found in both sections in the same edition

# Results

- A total of 223 papers with either “review” or “synthesis” in the title were retrieved and included in our analysis
- We identified three primary themes:

## Theme 1

- Descriptors of review type

## Theme 2

- Adherence to established review method

## Theme 3

- Clarity about review processes

## How was searching undertaken in papers that were included?

- All papers aimed for comprehensive searching using databases and PRISMA frequently used
- Not all documented additional searches such as reference list searches
- No evidence of sampling

## How was critical appraisal undertaken in papers that were included?

- All reviewers undertook critical appraisal
- This referred to relevance and/or quality
- Some used this as an inclusion criteria and pre-set quality standards but most did not
- Most reviewers undertook an inclusive approach
- The purpose of appraisal not always clear

# How was data analysis undertaken in papers that were included?

- Different terms used for analysis: narrative, content, thematic
- Often not explained
  - For example, in a SR where meta-analysis was possible but not undertake, lack of clarity on how to proceed

# Implications for researchers and students

- Researchers and MSc, MSN, DNP, PhD students need to engage with the ongoing debate about different methods
- Adhere to a specific method and use the original source
- Call for clarity and uniformity regarding the different approaches that are available



# Conclusion/Next Steps

- This proliferation of terms used to describe a literature review is a cause for concern
- Further investigation is warranted to develop expert consensus for use of terms among scientific journal editors, and reviewers
- We will undertake further study to seek clarity among academic scholarly community

# International team

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- Dr. Caroline Bradbury-Jones: University of Birmingham, United Kingdom
- Dr. Diana Baptiste: Johns Hopkins School of Nursing, United States
- Mr. Quanlei Li, Johns Hopkins School of Nursing, United States/Chinese Journal of Nursing, China

**Thank you!**

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