

Perspectives in Public Health review guidelines

What is a review?

'Review' refers usually to an impartial assessment of the evidence in published literature, with conclusions that acknowledge the weight of the evidence and cite a comprehensive range of publications from accredited researchers.

A literature review is essentially a research synthesis. It may also be described as an interpretation of published (or occasionally unpublished) documents available from various sources on a specific topic.

Review format

Word length:

Reviews should not exceed 3000 words although longer papers may be considered if previously arranged with the editor. Shorter, more succinct reviews are more likely to be accepted.

Method:

- Brief indication of how literature review was conducted and what major sources of evidence were used, including pre-determined criteria on inclusion or exclusion e.g. by reference to the standards used by the Cochrane Collaboration.
- It should state the disciplinary databases consulted (e.g. medical, nursing, psychology etc.). For a review involving several steps in the research strategy, an algorithm will help to summarise this.

Checklist:

For an evidence based review, we expect:

- A new topic, or an existing topic with new and important information
- An introduction defining the topic and relevance to public health
- Clear description of how the literature research was conducted and evidence that a number of sources were consulted.
- Summary of all included papers in the results, including statistical analysis in a quantitative review. Results should be clearly presented and acronyms or technical terms explained.
- A clear synthesis and critical analysis of results (whether dealing with quantitative or qualitative research literature).
- A discussion that provides acknowledgement of controversies, recent developments and potential biases and ideas for future research
- Discussion summarises key findings and does not introduce new results. Summary table.

Types of review

Update (non-systematic review). These reviews are commissioned from experts in the field.

Non-quantitative systematic review. This type of review includes a comprehensive examination of the literature, seeking to identify and synthesise relevant information.

The method of undertaking the review should be described, including the date range, search parameters and factors such as whether it includes only English-language papers, or a search limited to only a few countries.

A review of **qualitative studies** should specify appropriate methods for assessing the studies, referring to guidelines such as those provided on the Cochrane database, which includes this example:

Quantitative systematic review (meta-analysis) seeks to answer a specific question, which should be clearly stated in the introduction. The method should include how the statistical analysis of pooled research studies was conducted. It should include how the literature search was done and include several sources of evidence-based reviews, such as the Cochrane Collaboration, BMJ's *Clinical Evidence*, or the InfoRetriever Web site.

Guidelines for analysing and reporting a systematic review should be followed, e.g. PRISMA (Preferred Items for Reporting of Systematic Reviews) or MOOSE.

Examples and reference material

Critical review of bariatric surgery, medically supervised diets, and behavioural interventions for weight management in adults. *Perspectives in Public Health* June 27, 2016 1757913916653425

Available at:

<http://rsh.sagepub.com/content/early/2016/06/23/1757913916653425.full>

Qualitative review information:

http://handbook.cochrane.org/chapter_20/box_20_3_a_directly_observed_therapy_and_tuberculosis_a.htm

Framework for a qualitative analysis of a literature review:

<http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR17/onwuegbuzie.pdf>

- Liberati A, Taricco M. How to do and report systematic reviews and meta-analysis. In Franchignoni F, editor. *Research in Physical & Rehabilitation Medicine*. Pavia: Maugeri Foundation Books; 2010, p. 137-164.
- Moher D, Liberati A, Tetzlaff J, Altman DA. Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses: the PRISMA statement. *Ann Intern Med* 2009; 151: 264-269.
- Liberati A, Altman DG, Tetzlaff J et al. The PRISMA statement for reporting systematic reviews and meta-analyses of studies that evaluate health care interventions: explanation and elaboration. *Ann Intern Med* 2009; 151: W-65-W-94.
- van Tulder MW, Assendelft WJ, Koes BW, Bouter LM. Method guidelines for systematic reviews in the Cochrane Back Review group for Spinal Disorders. *Spine* 1997; 22: 2323-2330.
- Guyatt GH, Oxman AD, Vist GE, Kunz R, Falck-Ytter Y, Alonso-Coello P, et

al. Rating quality of evidence and strength of recommendations: GRADE: an emerging consensus on rating quality of evidence and strength of recommendations. *BMJ* 2008; 336: 924–926.

Review checklist

- **Abstract.** Approximately 200 words, with at least 3 keywords for indexing (3-6 range). Use the general format of aim, method, results and conclusion. The abstract should briefly include the objective(s), data sources and method of extraction, main results and main sources of variation, as appropriate. The conclusion should provide a clear statement of main findings, as well as their generalisability and limitations.
- **Introduction:** this should define the topic and purpose of the review and its relevance to public health. This will normally include an overview of the epidemiology of the disease/ problem, such as its incidence and prevalence. If restricting the review to a particular country/countries this should also be stated.
- **Method:** Brief indication of how literature review was conducted and what major sources of evidence were used, including pre-determined criteria on inclusion or exclusion e.g. by reference to the standards used by the Cochrane Collaboration. It should state the disciplinary databases consulted (e.g. medical, nursing, psychology etc.). For a review involving several steps in the research strategy, an algorithm will help to summarise this.
- **Results:** Critically evaluate the quality of research and avoid referencing only information supporting your view. If there is controversy on a topic, address the scope comprehensively. There should be no more than four tables or figures in print, excluding boxes to summarise key points in the discussion. The editor may ask for large tables to appear as supplementary information online.
- **Discussion:** Highlight key points (usually 2-4) and consider a table or box summarising key points for the reader. Any recommendations should include the strength of the evidence supporting them. A good discussion will identify relevant and appropriate information for the reader, as well as indications for further research.
- **References:** These should include the original research paper rather than its citation in a textbook i.e. primary rather than secondary sources, except where citing an expert opinion or another review of the evidence. References should also be up to date and reflect the range of current research. The reference list for paper publication should not exceed 100

references for systematic reviews and 50 for other reviews. Longer reference lists may be accepted and published online only.

- **Statement of any conflict of interest:** For example, if the author has a commercial interest in the topic, this must be stated, as well as funding source, particularly if this is related to the topic.