**Webisode 4 - Producing a mixed-methods systematic review**

Presenters: Mukdarut Bangpan and Kelly Dickson (EPPI-Centre, UCL)

EPPI-Centre Evidence Tools, Products, and Projects – A series of webisodes from the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating (EPPI) Centre. Hosted by AIR’s Center on Knowledge Translation for Disability and Rehabilitation Research (KTDRR).

YouTube video: <https://youtu.be/_Hq8uxoLNCA>

JOANN STARKS: Welcome to another session from “EPPI-Centre Evidence Tools, Products, and Projects.” This series of brief webisodes will introduce the audience to several tools, products, and projects of the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre). Based at University College London’s Institute of Education, the EPPI-Centre focuses on the development of systematic reviews and studies the use of research evidence.

I am Joann Starks from the Center on Knowledge Translation for Disability and Rehabilitation Research or KTDRR, at American Institutes for Research. The Center on KTDRR is sponsoring these webisodes with support received from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

This session focuses on Producing a Mixed Methods Systematic Review. Ourpresenters are Mukdarut Bangpan and Kelly Dickson. Both are Research Officers with the EPPI-Centre.

Mukdarut’s interests include: Social interventions; gender, health and well-being of children and women in developing countries; and systematic reviews in international development. Kelly’s interests include: Systematic reviews in health and social care and working with review groups to undertake systematic reviews. Welcome, Mukdarut and Kelly. I will now hand things over to you.

KELLY DICKSON: Thank you, Joann. So today Mukdarut and I will talk about producing a mixed-method systematic review for policy. Systematic reviews commissioned for policy audiences can inform different stages of the policy making process. From defining and framing the problem, to offering evidence on the impact or implementation of policy options. Doing so is made possible by drawing on the most appropriate primary research to address a particular policy concern or question, such as process evaluation when considering factors relevant to implementing different policy options.

We can also think about different contexts for achieving systematic reviews for different policy audiences. For example, reviews may be commissioned to address common problems, requiring generalizable open access to evidence. Or they may be commissioned to address specific decisions to inform immediate local policy concerns, often in a short time frame.

Within each of these broad review aims, the conceptual clarity of a review may also vary. With the key concepts existing on a continuum from widely agreed and clear, to not very well defined. When further conceptual clarity is needed, this might benefit from deliberation time with wider stakeholders.

Today, my colleague will talk through some of the approaches we adopted to produce generalizable evidence for the humanitarian sector, a policy arena relatively new to using evidence to inform their policy in practice decision making. I will now hand you over to Mukdarut.

MUKDARUT BANGPAN: Thank you, Kelly. Here I will talk about our mixed methods systematic review we conducted last year. That review is part of the Humanitarian Evidence Programme, a partnership between Oxfam and Feinstein International Center at Tufts University.

The Humanitarian Evidence Programme published eight systematic reviews in areas identified as a priority by humanitarian policy and perspectives of stakeholders. Within the sector, many may find it difficult to find much that speaks to their context. Decision makers often aren't very broad with their questions. To address these challenges, we reflect on our methods when conducting that review, focusing on mental health and psychosocial programmes for people affected by humanitarian emergencies.

This diagram shows the conceptual framework of the review. We understand that the humanitarian sector is a diverse field of inquiry. It can include different types of emergencies, ranging from natural disasters, such as earthquake or typhoons, to protracted conflict.

To consider the effectiveness and implementation of programmes addressing a broad range of outcomes, including mental health and psychosocial well-being, we needed a comprehensive and flexible conceptual framework. To achieve this, we were able to draw on the guideline on mental health and psychosocial support in emergency settings. Which, there were lots, from stakeholder input from United Nations agencies, NGOs, and academic institutions. These guidelines provided an intervention framework in the form of a layered system of MHPSS support, which was used to map and support studies in the review, and support its useful identification of gaps in the evidence base.

We also drew on existing research literature to provide us with widely-recognized definitions of humanitarian emergencies, implementation characteristics, and outcomes such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and other social outcomes.

In terms of overall methodology, we started with conducting a scoping exercise, looking at systematic reviews in the field. We included both quantitative and qualitative evidence to address three main research questions. The first questions were to identify barriers and facilitators of implementing and receiving MHPSS programmes. We combined a process of evaluation studies, applying a semantic synthesis approach.

To address the second research question of effectiveness of the programmes, we statistically combined the findings from randomized controlled trials. Finally, we brought the findings from the meta-analysis, and a qualitative synthesis together with the identified key features of effective, in MHPSS intervention.

We also recognize that we need utility for such a process and engage with advisory group, including policy makers. So at the beginning of the review process, we set up an advisory group. Involving stakeholders can support the research process by ensuring that the scope and findings of the review are relevant and accessible. Their role was to provide policy and practice perspective to ensure that the review remained contextually relevant, and to advise on the review scope.

The search processes were iterative. We identified key terms from the scoping exercise, then there were a lot of other research strategies, consulted with the advisory group, and revisiting other key concepts, and such strategy.

In addition, like for most systematic reviews, we aimed to conduct a comprehensive search of the literature. We found that, similar to previous reviews we have done, relying on databases is not sufficient. Some areas of research, such as process evaluation of programmes, were more often found by hand searches.

Another key aspect of producing relevance in systematic reviews is the judgment about study quality. A common criticism of systematic reviews, and a concern for the Humanitarian Evidence Programme, was the potential to miss important lessons from studies of lower quality. Our approach was twofold. The first was to retain our studies, but to grade the quantitative evidence, considering study quality, number of studies, and effect size, before making summary statements on the programme's effectiveness.

The second was to judge reliability and relevance, of process evaluation. By approaching this through the evidence emphasis, this approach draws on other institutional learning, and addressed concerns from policy and practitioners keen to use evidence.

Lastly, not only did we draw on questions and concepts defined by humanitarian organizations, we have also found them essential for sharing the findings. Our interpersonal relationships and networks here have increased that admissibility of the review findings. Through working closely with others as part of a community of practice, we were able to discuss the current evidence base, and implications for future research. And with our close working relationship with the funder, leads to a lot of dissemination strategies to a wider policy and practice network.

You can find more about this systematic review on the Oxfam and EPPI-Centre websites. Thank you.

JOANN STARKS: Thank you very much out in Kelly for sharing the epic center perspective on producing a mixed methods systematic review. We also want to thank our funding agency, NIDILRR, for supporting this and other webcast activities. Please look for the other sessions in this series on the EPPI-Centre Evidence, Tools, Products, and Projects.