**Webisode 5 – The Benefits and Challenges of Reviews of Reviews**

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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).

**Slide 1: Cover slide**

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**Slide 2: The Benefits and Challenges of Reviews of Reviews**

February 2018. Katy Sutcliffe, Ginny Brunton (EPPI-Centre, UCL). **Conflict of Interest statement:** We have no actual or potential conflicts of interest in relation to this presentation.

**Title slide template:** Blue bar at top. On far left, Institute of Education. On the far right, UCL Logo: White image of Main Building with large white letters UCL to the right. In the center background, a photograph of London with title text superimposed over the image. White bar at the bottom: On far right, EPPI-Centre logo: A large blue script letter E to the left, with smaller black letters PPI to the right. Below PPI, in a smaller black box, is the word CENTRE in white text.

**Slide 3: What is a Review of Reviews (RoR)??**

• RoR: also referred to as ‘umbrella review’, ‘overview of reviews’, and ‘meta-review’,

• Aim: to address a specific research question

• Methods: systematic search, pre-specified eligibility criteria, quality assessment, synthesis of results

• Data: systematic reviews (SR)

• Level of analysis: SR = secondary research, RoR = tertiary research

**Slide 4: In what situations might it be useful to do a RoR rather than SR?**

1. When the research question is broad

2. When there is already a large body of SRs on the topic

3. When time/resources are constrained

**Slide 5: What are the benefits of conducting a RoR?**

• Speeds up review process as reduces the searching/screening burden

* SRs are much easier to identify than primary research
* Takes advantage of the comprehensive searching and screening undertaken in SRs

• Increases accessibility of burgeoning body of SRs for decision-makers

* Where there are multiple reviews on same issue users may find it hard to decide which to use

**Slide 6: But RoRs pose significant challenges…**

• Many papers on challenges of RoRs – key challenges raised include:

* Overlap between reviews (studies appearing in more than one review)
* Lack of coverage of RoR question (e.g. missing populations, outcomes)
* Lack of detail (insufficient detail on area of interest is reported at review-level)
* Quality Assessment (quality of review is dependent on quality of included studies – possibility of lack of detail at both levels may hinder appraisal)

• Some examples of how we have addressed issues

**Slide 7: Example 1: How we managed overlap**

• Acknowledging overlap

• Examination of common studies' contributions to each review

• Avoid vote-counting

• Extract information from one SR based on pre-specified criteria e.g. review that is/has

* most recent
* highest quality review
* largest number of included studies
* most complete data on effect size estimates

 **Slide 8: Example 2: How we managed lack of fit with RoR question**

• Careful attention to whether findings address all possible concepts

* e.g. emotional and behavioural outcomes of looked-after youth may not be the only way to conceptualise 'wellbeing' (Dickson et al. 2010)

• Analysis of similar reviews' divergent findings (e.g. differences might be due to different population under study)

• Explain why reviews are not amenable to statistical synthesis

• Conduct a new review instead!

**Slide 9: Example 3: How we managed insufficient detail in SRs**

• Retrieve primary studies and re-extract

• Include primary studies to supplement

• Note it as a caveat: the efficacy of interventions may be limited by the availability of primary research

* i.e. lack of review-level evidence on interventions does not mean those are ineffective, they just haven't been reviewed

• Discuss the implications of missing information on the findings of the overview

**Slide 10: Example 4: How we managed Quality Assessment**

• Include only reviews which have detailed reporting of the quality of primary studies

* but at the cost of a loss of information
* consider carefully whether the purpose of the review is better served by comprehensiveness or lessened uncertainty
* possible compromises:

• only limit if large number of reviews available

• don't limit if intent of overview is to enlighten rather than inform decision

**Slide 11: Strengths and limitations of RoRs**

Strengths: Good for swift, accurate appraisal of a broad area of research within a short timescale using few researchers

Limitations: Issues of Overlap, Lack of fit with RQ, Insufficient detail, Quality assessment

**Slide 12: Key papers**

• Caird J, Sutcliffe K, Kwan I, Dickson K, Thomas J (2015). *Mediating policy-relevant evidence at speed: are systematic reviews of systematic reviews a useful approach?* Evidence & Policy. 11(1): 81-97

• Pollock A, Campbell P, Brunton G, Hunt H, Estcourt L (2017). *Selecting and implementing overview methods: implications from five exemplar overviews.* Systematic Reviews. 6(1): 145.

• Lunny C, Brennan SE, Mcdonald S, Mckenzie JE (2017). *Toward a comprehensive evidence map of overview of systematic review methods: paper 1—purpose, eligibility, search and data extraction.* Systematic Reviews 6(1): 231

**Slide 13: Thank you**

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The EPPI-Centre is part of the Social Science Research Unit at the Institute of Education, University of London.

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Image on right: London at night - the London Eye on left, bridge over River Thames center, Westminster Palace in background on right.

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**Slide 14**: **Disclaimer**

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