Meta-ethnography Reporting Guideline

Glossary of terms for Lay Users of the eMERGE Meta-Ethnography Reporting Guidance

Abstract - a concise summary of a journal article's or report's content that appears at the start of the document.

Aim of review/synthesis - the overall purpose of a review/synthesis. The over-arching topic that researchers want to answer with their review.

Comprehensive literature search - a search designed to generate as comprehensive a list as possible of **primary studies** (articles, books, thesis, reports, etc), which may be suitable for answering the questions posed in the review. Topics and **research questions** are generally established in advance and searches are usually linear.

Concept - an explanatory idea.

Conceptual framework- a network of linked concepts or ideas which come from the researcher's own analysis or from existing theory, and which provide an understanding of the phenomenon under scrutiny

Data extraction – in a **systematic review or synthesis,** the process of identifying and recording data from primary study accounts ahead of synthesis. Data in the context of a qualitative evidence synthesis will be in the format of concepts, themes, metaphors and/or explanations rather than numerical or statistical data.

ENTREQ- stands for enhancing transparency in reporting the synthesis of qualitative research, a Guidance which can be found in Tong *et al.*[1]

Exclusion criteria (see also **inclusion criteria) -** a list of objective exclusion criteria which allows reviewers to address the review question(s) and clearly define the boundaries of the review. Exclusion criteria refer to those aspects of a study that fall out with the boundaries of a review's scope. Exclusion criteria can relate to types of participants or study settings but they can also refer to study design and time periods.

First order construct(s) – **Second order construct(s)** and **Third order construct(s) –** terms sometimes used in meta-ethnographies[2]. First order constructs are generally the findings as reported by primary study participants (e.g. quotations from them), second order constructs are the interpretation of those findings made by authors of the original study. Third order construts are the interpretations of the synthesis team undertaking for instance the meta-ethnography review (as they interpret the second order constructs and concepts from the studies they review), **Full text review –** in a systematic review, the process of reading an entire publication to check its relevance for the review or synthesis e.g. full text could refer to a journal publication or a research report.

Included studies – in a systematic review or synthesis, the **primary studies** to be synthesised. It should be noted that included studies may differ from included papers. That is, one study included in a synthesis could result in two journal papers. This means a review could include one study but two papers.

Inclusion criteria (see also **exclusion criteria) -** a list of objective inclusion criteria allows reviewers to address the review question(s) and clearly define the boundaries of the review. Studies that are eligible for inclusion in a review must meet the inclusion criteria (and not meet the exclusion criteria). Inclusion criteria refer to those aspects of a study that meet the scope of a review and help answer the research question Inclusion criteria can relate to types of participants and settings (e.g. adults with cancer in acute care), types of publication (eg peer-reviewed publications) s; (primary study design and conduct (eg research using focus groups and interviews) and study relevance to the review question(s).

Index paper – the primary study account used as the starting point for the analysis and synthesis in a **qualitative synthesis**[3, 4]**.** This could be the earliest published account or one chosen for another reason, e.g. because it is **conceptually rich.**

Interpretation- a way of explaining the meaning of something.

Interpretive synthesis– a category of syntheses that try to interpret and understand the world by bringing together, interpreting and arranging the findings from different studies to gain deeper understandings of a particular phenomenon[5].

Line of argument synthesis - a way of synthesising data used in **meta-ethnography** when the qualitative studies under review identify different aspects of the topic that can be drawn together in a new interpretation. According to Noblit and Hare[6], a line of argument synthesis goes further than **translation** and puts any similarities and dissimilarities into a new interpretive context - what we can say about the whole, based on selected studies of the parts. However, since their book there have been many different definitions and understandings of what a line of argument is. George Noblit has since defined a line of argument as the new 'storyline' or overarching explanation of a synthesis.

Literature search, comprehensive - a search designed to generate as comprehensive a list as possible of **primary studies**, which may be suitable for answering the questions posed in the review. Topics and **research questions** are generally established in advance and searches are usually, but not always, linear.

Literature search, iterative - the search is a dynamic, non-linear process that takes shape as the review evolves and is repeated. The focus, breadth and depth of the review are not tightly defined and evolve in an iterative manner during the search(es).

Literature search strategy - in a **systematic review**, the process of how the searches for literature (studies) were conducted including which databases were searched and which search terms were used.

Meta-ethnography (also called Noblit and Hare's approach[6])– is an **interpretive** method of qualitative evidence synthesis developed by Noblit and Hare in 1988 and is currently the most common form of **qualitative evidence synthesis** used in health related research. Originally it was developed to synthesise the findings from **ethnography** studies, but since its development it has been used to synthesise other qualitative research. Meta-ethnography identifies concepts in the studies under

review and systematically compares the meanings of the concepts in different studies, taking account of the different study contexts and examining similarities and differences between concepts. This process is called "**translation**"[6] and the result of this process is an interpretive synthesis of the studies under review.

Metaphor - an explanatory idea in the form of a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable (https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/metaphor).

Model – a **theory**, **hypothesis**, representation or idea. There are various meanings specific to different academic disciplines. In psychology, a model is a **theory** to predict outcomes and explain specific psychological processes. In qualitative research in sociology, a model is a verbal or graphic form of representing data or knowledge.

Narrative (or Narrative format) refers to the synthesis of the meta-ethnography, which can be expressed in written words or by visual representation (diagrams).

Nvivo software programme which supports the analysis of qualitative data

Objectives (study/research objectives) - the specific steps resarchers need to take to achieve their aim.

Philosophical stance / underpinning – this refers to the underlying world view or belief systems upon which different research **paradigms** are based. Qualitative and quantitative approaches are rooted in different philosophical traditions or paradigms.

Primary studies - new (or original?) research, carried out to answer specific issues or questions. It can involve questionnaires, observation, surveys, clinical trials or interviews with individuals or small groups.

Purposive sample – also referred to as judgement, selective or subjective sampling[7, 8]. Used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of 'information-rich cases', e.g. key participants or journal articles related to the topic of interest. The researcher relies on his / her own judgement to select the cases based on his / her knowledge of the research topic.

Qualitative evidence synthesis – see also **Qualitative synthesis** & **Meta-synthesis -** In a qualitative evidence synthesis, the researcher identifies qualitative studies on a particular topic and pulls together – or synthesises - their findings. Merging or synthesising the findings of individual qualitative studies on a topic can enable us to gain a richer and more comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon or health issue compared to any single study on its own.

Quality appraisal - systematic reviews usually include a detailed appraisal of the primary research studies identified which often focuses on their methodological quality. There is debate about whether quality appraisal is needed for a **qualitative synthesis** and what kind of appraisal should be conducted**.**

Quantitative research - involves measuring or counting things and generates numerical data or data that can be converted into numbers. Quantitative research aims to generate data which can be generalised to the wider population.

Reporting criteria- criteria required from the reviewer in which they are reporting the process they undertook.

Reciprocal translation (see also **translation**) - a data analysis process used in **meta-ethnography** when concepts in one study can incorporate those of another because they are very similar in meaning.

Reflexivity - an attitude of reflecting on the process and context of knowledge construction, especially in relation to the researcher, at every step of the research process because the perspective of the researcher also shapes all research.

Refutational translation (see also **translation**) **-** a data analysis process used in **meta-ethnography** when the concepts in different studies- or the studies themselves- contradict or refute one another[9].

Reliability- this refers to the consistency of the results of a review (do they represent the topic under study accurately?), and whether the review is sound (has the methodology been soundly applied?)

Reviewer- refers to the researcher(s) who is/are undertaking the meta-ethnography

Research question(s) - question(s) that you want to answer by doing a research study

Review question(s) – question(s) that you want to answer by doing a **systematic review** or synthesis.

Screening (of studies/ literature) –in a **systematic review**, the process of identifying relevant research studies from all the literature identified through searches. It usually involves applying **inclusion and exclusion criteria** to the studies.

Synthesis- a way of combining parts to make a whole.

Synthesising translations – this is the analytic synthesis process in a meta-ethnography. According to Noblit & Hare[6], the originators of meta-ethnography, it involves 'making a whole into something more than the parts alone imply,' i.e. the synthesis aims to provide a fresh interpretation of a phenomenon.

Thematic synthesis - Uses **thematic analysis** to identify common themes or issues across studies. This method was developed to address specific **review questions** about need, appropriateness and acceptability of interventions (e.g. a new treatment), as well as effectiveness. People's views and experiences are taken into account, and **hypotheses** that could be tested against the findings of qualitative studies are generated. Developed by Thomas and Harden[10], who view the product of such a synthesis as informing practice or policy.

Theory – an organised set of concepts or ideas that explains a phenomenon, or set of phenomena, under review.

Theoretical saturation- refers to the process in the review when all the data has been analysed and all the concepts have been developed and verified, and no further data is required. **In meta-ethnography** this means that all alternative or refutational interpretations have been considered, and incorporated in the final synthesis.

Translation - this is the analysis process in a meta-ethnography. According to how Noblit and Hare[6] see it, it is about systematically comparing the meaning of the

different studies, taking account of the different study contexts (e.g. where and when they were done and with whom). It is through exploring the similarities and overlap (**reciprocal translation**), differences (**refutational translation**) or different aspects of the topic contained in the various studies (**line of argument synthesis**) that an interpretive synthesis of the studies is achieved.

Validity- although the term is normally used in quantitative research, it refers here to assessing whether the review adequately answers the aim and questions which were set at the start (does it answer the questions in a valid way?)

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