

An opinion piece on conducting a scoping review

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Scoping reviews influence future research practice, programmes, and policy and are a technique used to systematically map the evidence across various study types in an area. Scoping reviews are desperately needed in the health sector, particularly in South Africa. This article highlights what a scoping review is, its importance and how to conduct one; it also offers fundamental recommendations to help inexperienced researchers succeed with their scoping study.

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Introduction

An increasingly common method for combining research findings is the scoping review. Scoping reviews are comparably a new method for which there is not yet a set universal research definition or conclusive strategy. Scoping reviews are usually employed for reconnaissance or to define the operational definitions and conceptual limits of a subject or sector.¹ Scoping studies are especially helpful when a particular field of literature has not been thoroughly examined or shows a complex or diverse character that makes a more in-depth systematic review of the evidence arduous to conduct. Although scoping studies can be carried out to assess the usefulness and possible need for comprehensive systematic review, scoping studies can also be carried out to synthesise and distribute research findings, identify research gaps, and provide recommendations for future studies.¹ This article aims to explain why scoping reviews should be undertaken, how they are conducted, and the necessity for scoping studies on wound care in South Africa.

Why should researchers conduct scoping reviews?

There are several justifications for why a scoping review could be carried out. Scoping reviews, in contrast to other reviews, which often address very specific concerns, can be used to map the major ideas that underlie a field of study as well as to clarify working definitions and/or the conceptual limits of a topic.²

The following is a list of the criteria for scoping reviews:³

- As a preliminary step to a thorough analysis.
- To list the many kinds of evidence available in a particular area.
- To discover and investigate knowledge gaps.
- To make clear important terms and definitions from the literature.
- To investigate the methods used in research on a certain subject or area.
- To determine important aspects or components of a notion.

When it is still unclear what further, more precise questions may be raised for evidence syntheses and usefully answered, scoping reviews help analyse new evidence.

Even though there are few studies on the sustainability of knowledge translation intervention in the field of managing chronic diseases, a scoping study has laid the groundwork for a future systematic evaluation to investigate the effects of such interventions on health outcomes.⁴

In contrast to systematic reviews, scoping reviews do not often develop and present findings that have been combined from several sources of information after a thorough methodological evaluation procedure to assess the quality of the evidence. Scoping reviews instead seek to present a summary or map of the available evidence. As a result, it is often not done to evaluate the methodological constraints or bias risk of the data used in a scoping review.⁵ Using data from policy papers and reports that direct practice in a given field, scoping reviews may also be used to create “policy maps” that the South African healthcare system sorely needs.⁶

When examining a larger region to find gaps in the research knowledge base, the scoping of reviews and evidence-based healthcare practices are important.⁷ They are also used to discuss the kinds of evidence that are relevant to and useful for field practice.⁸

Reviewers should explain the reasoning behind their specific scoping review in both the procedure and the review because there are many different reasons one may be undertaken. This helps readers comprehend the significance of the subject and the rationale behind a specific sort of scoping review.

The importance of scoping reviews in wound care in the South African context

The lack of published South African wound data hinders researchers' ability to highlight major healthcare expenses and chronic patient

suffering. Wound management burdens placed on South African hospitals must be assessed. First-world studies show that a multidisciplinary wound care team may help diagnose and treat wounds to avoid complications. South Africa, a third-world nation with fewer resources and healthcare staff, would have a low success rate in controlling wounds, yet there is little study on the topic, highlighting a need for scoping reviews.

As it stands, there is no specific protocol for managing and referring patients who present with wounds. If this does not change, a sizeable portion of the patient population will be ignored in a systemic and structural manner. It is vital for policymakers to be concerned about the insufficient management of wound patients throughout the nation. Therefore, policymakers need to consider building a strategic framework for the care of patients with wounds, and once again, this further underlines an area in which scoping reviews should take place. It is important to consider the past of South Africa's healthcare system since it has had a considerable impact on the country's current policies and approaches to delivering healthcare.

How should a scoping review be conducted?

Step one is to define the subject matter you will analyse, including its goals and any relevant follow-up inquiries. The next step is to create a review methodology. The protocols serve as the blueprint for your review's overall structure. In this section, you will detail the eligibility criteria (for inclusion or exclusion), the screening method used for the literature, and the charting procedure you used. The next step is to apply the chosen framework structure and conduct an exhaustive search of the relevant literature, sort through the findings you've gathered, and only include the research that fulfils the eligibility requirements. The next step is to chart the data you have gathered from the collected studies. Finally, to answer your research question, you will need to write a summary of the evidence.

Frequently, simple frequency counts of ideas, populations, traits, and other data categories are sufficient for scoping reviews. Nonetheless, some writers of scoping reviews may choose to do more in-depth research, such as descriptive qualitative content analysis with basic data coding. Consequently, the findings of the scoping review might contain a summary of the categorised data. Importantly, qualitative content analysis in scoping reviews is often descriptive in character. Reviewers should not participate in theme analysis or synthesis since this would fall beyond the scope of a scoping review and more closely align with the objectives of a systematic review of qualitative evidence or qualitative evidence synthesis.

Scoping reviews and framework

1. Arksey and O'Malley framework:

- Choosing the research inquiry
- Selecting pertinent studies
- Study selection
- Creating a data map
- Assembling, analysing, and reporting the findings
- Discussion²

2. Enhancements proposed by Levac et al.:⁹

- Explicitly defining and connecting the goal and research topic
- Using an iterative team approach to choosing studies and retrieving

data

- Balancing feasibility with breadth and comprehensiveness of the scoping process
- Incorporating a numerical summary and qualitative thematic analysis
- Identifying the study's significance for research, practice, or policy
- Scoping study methods use discussion as a necessary component

3. Enhancements proposed by Peters et al.:¹⁰

- Retrieving the evidence
- Examining the evidence
- Presenting the findings
- Summarising the data considering the review's objectives, drawing inferences, and highlighting any implications of the results

4. PRISMA extension for scoping reviews:²¹

- Title – label the report as a scoping analysis.
- Abstract – Provide a structured summary that contains (where appropriate) background, goals, eligibility criteria, sources of evidence, charting techniques, findings, and conclusions relevant to the review's questions and objectives.
- Introduction – Describe the reasons for the review considering existing knowledge. Explain why the review questions and goals lend themselves to a scoping review. Provide a clear explanation of the review's questions and goals in relation to their important aspects (e.g., population or participants, ideas, and context) or other pertinent key elements utilised to conceive the review's questions and/or objectives.
- Methods – Indicate whether a review protocol exists, where it may be accessed (e.g., a Web URL), and registration details, including the registration number. Specify eligibility criteria for evidence sources (e.g., years considered, language, publication status) and explain a justification. List and specify all sought-after variables, assumptions, and simplifications. Describe the procedures utilised and how this information was utilised in any data synthesis, if done (if appropriate). Describe how charted data was handled and summarised.
- Results – Give numbers of evidence sources evaluated, appraised for eligibility, and included in the review, with explanations for exclusions at each step. Provide citations and charts for each source of evidence. If done, offer statistics on source evaluation. For each source of evidence, chart pertinent review questions and goals data. Summarise charting outcomes in relation to review questions and goals.
- Discussion – Summarise major conclusions (including ideas, themes, and evidence), relate to review questions and goals, and discuss relevance to important groups. Discuss scoping review's limits. Provide a broad interpretation of the data, including implications and future actions.
- Funding – Describe funding sources for the evidence and scope review.

The write-up of a scoping review

Title

The title needs to be concise, precise, and reflect the main points of the analysis.

There should be consistency between the title, review purpose, and inclusion criteria, and titles should not be written as questions or conclusions.¹¹

Abstract

Describe a broad review aim that is organised utilising the essential elements of the inclusion criteria (approximately one to two sentences). Briefly outline the topic and what is currently known about it in the introduction (approximately two to three sentences). Summarise the inclusion criteria in relation to the sort of review that is being done. Don't use distinct subheadings; instead, present the information in one or two phrases.¹²

Introduction

The introduction should be thorough and address all the key components of the subject under examination, as well as significant facts and the reasons why the subject or question of interest lends itself to a scoping study. As the introduction places the reason and importance of the issue or questions presented, the main goal of the scoping review should be clear in this part.¹³

While many of these details will already have been covered in the protocol's "Introduction" section, reviewers should discover that the background information included with the protocol needs to be updated or expanded considering the scoping review's completion, which now presents the review project's findings.¹³

Identifying the main queries the scoping review sought to answer is important.

Subquestions that relate to various conceptual focuses found in the scoping review, such as participant groups, treatments, outcome measurements, or deeper comprehension of a specific phenomenon of interest or idea, may be asked after it.¹⁴

Inclusion criteria

The goals of the scoping review should be aligned with the types of participants in the sought-after sources of evidence. In the introduction to the scoping review, the grounds for including or excluding the individuals mentioned in this section must be stated unambiguously.¹⁵

Methods

This section outlines the reviewers' process for locating pertinent sources of data to be used in the scoping review. All the major bibliographic citation databases and other sources that were searched should be listed in full in the search strategy report, which should be annexed to the review.¹⁶ A consistent structure and order should be used to report each specific search strategy for each database that was searched in an appendix. With justification of the search dates contained in the protocol, clear documentation of the search strategy is a crucial part of any scoping review's scientific validity. The review should outline the techniques used to settle differences amongst reviewers as well as the actual source of evidence screening process for all phases of selection (based on title and abstract inspection; based on full-text examination).¹⁷

Discussion

This part should not just repeat the review's findings; instead, it should

analyse the findings and any limitations of the sources used in the scoping review. Results ought to be examined considering recent literature, policy, and practice. The review is based on information on the review issue being accessible and is subject to the constraints of any review, including the potential omission of relevant data sources. It is impossible to grade the implications for practice or policy in a scoping review since there is no assessment of the quality of the evidence.¹⁸

Conclusion

A broad conclusion based on the findings should be presented at the start of this section.

The findings should be consistent with the review's objective(s) and question(s). The research's conclusions should have obvious, specific ramifications for future studies based on knowledge gaps found in the review's findings.²⁰

The conduct of systematic reviews in the future, if suitable, as well as original research in the relevant field, may be the subject of comments from the authors.²⁰

Conclusion

Scoping reviews are a novel research method, but they are becoming a more popular method for mapping vast themes. Scoping reviews are an essential instrument for synthesising the available data. The mapping of core concepts and supporting data makes possible the evaluation of practice, policy, and research, as well as the identification of evidence and policy gaps. The findings of scoping reviews can indicate areas where more study may be necessary and guide the advancement of ongoing research.

Wound care, in particular in the context of South Africa, needs to be examined with a great deal more scrutiny, and multiple scoping reviews need to be conducted for policymakers to make the essential adjustments to how wound care is approached throughout the country.

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