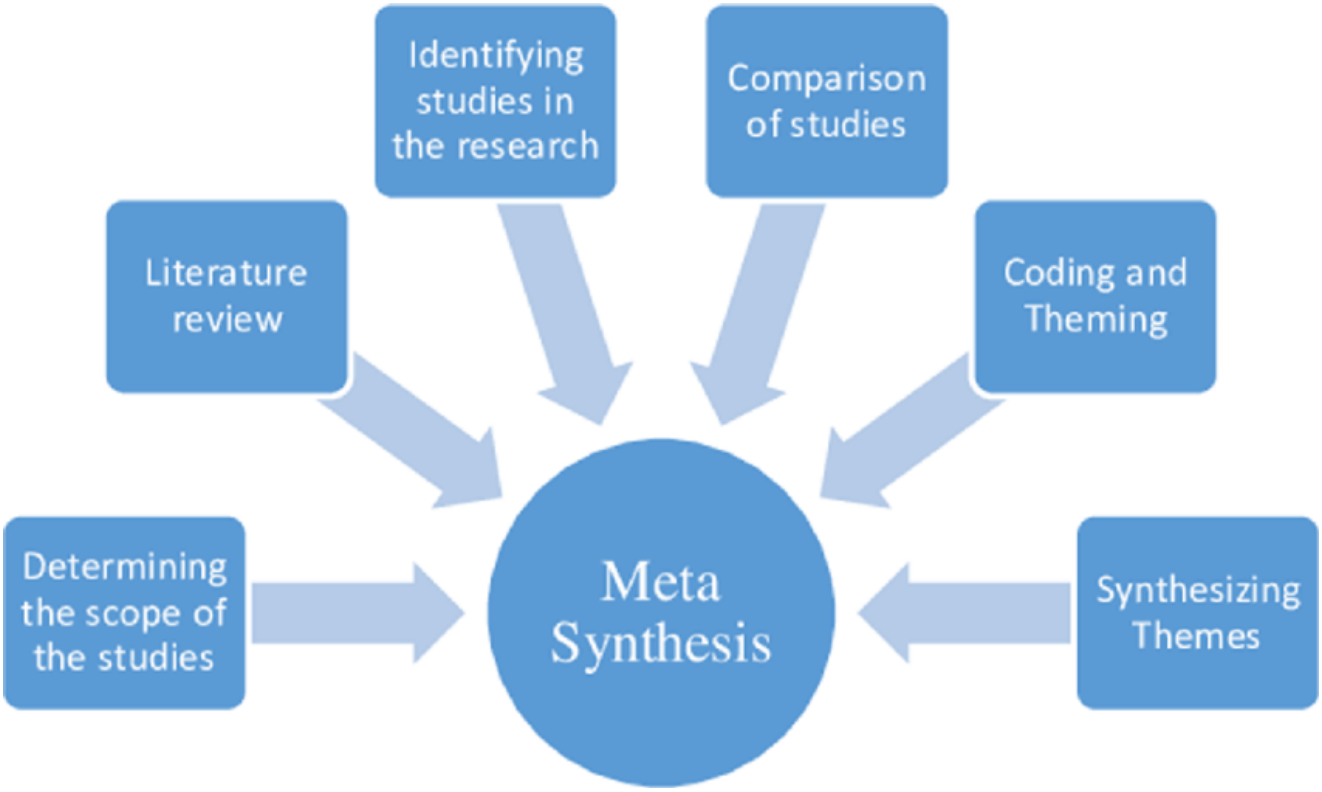
Metasynthesis Of Qualitative Research

simplypsychology.org/metasynthesis.html



What is Metasynthesis?

Metasynthesis is a type of systematic review which synthesizes qualitative research findings from individual studies to generate new interpretations and advance a field of knowledge.

Metasynthesis is considered original research and uses previously published qualitative research reports as its database.

Although considered analogous to quantitative meta-analysis, metasynthesis has developed its own dimensions and directions.

There is, however, lively debate and disagreement regarding the appropriate methods for conducting metasynthesis and the types of conclusions drawn.

Purpose

Metasynthesis interprets, evaluates, and presents the similar and different aspects of the findings of qualitative studies in a particular field.

The outcomes often include theory development, higher-level abstraction, generalizability, and new knowledge development.

When is Metasynthesis Appropriate?

Qualitative metasynthesis is appropriate to answer research questions about human experiences when multiple qualitative studies on the topic are available.

The goal is to use a structured, transparent, and auditable method to advance knowledge in a field of study.

Qualitative metasynthesis is best suited to reinterpret meaning and generate new theories or explanations of interventions based on findings from multiple high-quality qualitative studies.

Conducting Qualitative Metasynthesis Research

Step 1: Formulating a Research Question for Qualitative Metasynthesis

The first step in any research project, including a qualitative metasynthesis, is **posing a question**. Although this sounds straightforward, it is a critical and nuanced process.

This question should be broad enough to be interesting but focused enough to be manageable.

As the researcher becomes more familiar with the body of literature, they can refine their question to guide them toward meaningful decisions about what to include in the metasynthesis.

- **Familiarize yourself with the literature:** To begin deciding what you are looking for, you need to become familiar with the existing literature on your topic of interest.

- **Develop a flexible yet determined research question:** As you engage with the literature, your goal is to develop a research question that is “both flexible and determined.” This means that the research question is flexible enough to allow you to approach most of the research literature within the area you wish to explore. At the same time, it needs to be specific enough that your eventual metasynthesis contributes something novel and does not simply reproduce a “catalogue of what is already known.”
- **The Research Question as Compass:** The research question in this type of study is best understood “more like a compass than an anchor” because it helps guide you through the existing research toward meaningful decisions about what to include and exclude.

Examples

Metasynthesis research questions often seek to develop new theoretical understandings of human experiences by synthesizing findings from multiple qualitative studies.

- What inductive theory can be built regarding clients’ experiences of their conjoint couple or family therapy?
- The purposes of this systematic review and metasynthesis are first to synthesize qualitative studies documenting men’s breast cancer narratives into an empirically based explanatory framework, and second to compare men’s experience of breast cancer to women.
- The goal of the current research is to synthesize qualitative research that focuses on the role of masculinities in close male friendships. Our analysis is guided by the following research question: How are masculine norms enacted within boys’ and men’s close friendships?
- What are the potential common themes and psychological phenomena underpinning male suicide risk and recovery as perceived and experienced by men who are suicidal, and people bereaved by male suicide?

Step 2: Conducting a Systematic Literature Search

The next step is to conduct a systematic search of the qualitative literature using clearly defined search terms and databases.

This may include searching electronic databases, reviewing reference lists of relevant articles, and contacting experts in the field.

It's important to be transparent about the search strategy and document all decisions for auditability. The goal is to identify all potentially relevant studies for consideration.

Both STARLITE (Standards for Reporting Literature searches) and PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses) provide appropriate guidance for reporting qualitative literature searches.

Information Sources

To capture as much available data within certain parameters, an inclusive **search strategy** is recommended.

> Specify all databases, registers, websites, organisations, reference lists and other sources searched or consulted to identify studies. Specify the date when each source was last searched or consulted.
>
> *PRISMA 2020 Checklist*

An **exhaustive, systematic search strategy** is developed with the assistance of an expert librarian.

- **Databases:** Searches should include seven key databases: CINAHL, Medline, APA PsycArticles, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, APA PsycInfo, SocINDEX with Full Text, and Web of Science: Core Collections.
- **Grey Literature:** In addition to databases, forensic or 'expansive' searches can be conducted. This includes: conference proceedings, unpublished reports, theses, ongoing clinical trial databases, searches by names of authors of relevant publications.
- **Citation Searching**: Reference lists often lead to highly cited and influential papers in the field, providing valuable context and background information for the review.

It is important to note that this may not be an exhaustive list of all potential databases.

Search Strategy

> Present the full search strategies for all databases, registers and websites, including any filters and limits used.
>
> *PRISMA 2020 Checklist*

- **Keywords:** Search terms should be relevant to the research questions, key variables, participants, and research design. Derivatives of the key variables AND “qualitative OR mixed-methods” can be used. Searches should include indexed terms, titles, and abstracts. Additionally, each database has specific indexed terms, so a targeted search strategy must be created for each database.
- **Synonyms:** These are words or phrases with similar meanings to the keywords, as authors may use different terms to describe the same concepts. Including synonyms helps cover variations in terminology and increases the chances of finding all relevant studies. For example, a drug intervention may be referred to by its generic name or by one of its several proprietary names.
- **Truncation symbols**: These broaden the search by capturing variations of a keyword. They function by locating every word that begins with a specific root. For example, if a user was researching interventions for smoking, they might use a truncation symbol to search for “smok*” to retrieve records with the words “smoke,” “smoker,” “smoking,” or “smokes.” This can save time and effort by eliminating the need to input every variation of a word into a database.
- **Boolean operators:** The use of Boolean operators (AND/OR/NEAR/NOT) helps to combine these terms effectively, ensuring that the search strategy is both sensitive and specific. For instance, using “AND” narrows the search to include only results containing both terms, while “OR” expands it to include results containing either term.

When conducting these searches, it is important to combine browsing of texts (publications) with periods of more focused systematic searching. This iterative process allows the search to evolve as the review progresses.

It is important to note that this information may not be entirely comprehensive and up-to-date. You may want to consult other sources for more information and to confirm the accuracy of this information.

Step 3: Screening and Selecting Appropriate Research Articles

Once the literature search is complete, the next step is to screen and select the studies that will be included in the metasynthesis.

This involves carefully reviewing each study to determine its relevance to the research question and its methodological quality.

The goal is to identify studies that are both relevant to the research question and of sufficient quality to contribute to a meaningful synthesis.

Eligibility criteria

> Specify the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the review.
>
> *PRISMA 2020 Checklist*

Eligibility criteria are a set of predefined characteristics used to determine which studies will be included or excluded from a metasynthesis.

These criteria are based on the research question and the specific goals of the metasynthesis. Clearly defining and specifying the eligibility criteria is essential to ensure that the included studies are relevant, appropriate, and able to contribute to the metasynthesis findings.

For example, researchers might choose to focus on a specific population group, a particular time period, or studies employing specific qualitative research methods.

When specifying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, consider the following aspects:

1. **Research design**: Specify the types of qualitative research designs that will be included, such as phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, or case studies. Determine whether mixed-method studies with a qualitative component will be included.
2. **Participants or population**: Define the characteristics of the participants or population of interest, such as age, gender, health condition, or socio-economic status.

3. **Phenomena of interest**: Clearly state the specific phenomena, experiences, or concepts that the metasynthesis aims to explore. For instance, if the metasynthesis is exploring the experiences of patients with chronic illnesses, the phenomena of interest might include coping mechanisms, social support systems, or perceptions of healthcare services.
4. **Setting or context**: Specify the setting or context in which the studies should have been conducted, such as healthcare settings, community settings, or specific geographical locations. This helps ensure that the included studies are contextually relevant to the research question.
5. **Language**: Determine which languages will be included in the metasynthesis, considering the language skills of the research team and the availability of resources for translation.
6. **Time frame**: Specify the time period within which the studies should have been conducted or published. For example, when studying a topic influenced by societal changes or technological advancements, researchers might choose a more recent timeframe to capture contemporary perspectives.
7. **Publication status**: Decide whether only published studies will be included or if unpublished works, such as dissertations or conference proceedings, will also be considered.
8. **Methodological quality**: Specify any criteria related to the methodological quality of the studies, such as the use of specific data collection or analysis techniques, or the assessment of study quality using established tools.

Selection Process

> Specify the methods used to decide whether a study met the inclusion criteria of the review, including how many reviewers screened each record and each report retrieved, whether they worked independently, and if applicable, details of automation tools used in the process.
>
> *PRISMA 2020 Checklist*

The selection process in qualitative metasynthesis involves multiple reviewers to ensure rigor and reliability.

Two reviewers should independently screen titles and abstracts, removing duplicates and irrelevant studies based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria.

1. **Initial screening of titles and abstracts:** After applying a strategy to search the literature, the next step involves screening the titles and abstracts of the identified articles against the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. During this initial screening, reviewers aim to identify potentially relevant studies while excluding those clearly outside the scope of the review. It is crucial to prioritize over-inclusion at this stage, meaning that reviewers should err on the side of keeping studies even if there is uncertainty about their relevance. This cautious approach helps minimize the risk of inadvertently excluding potentially valuable studies.
2. **Retrieving and assessing full texts:** For studies which a definitive decision cannot be made based on the title and abstract alone, reviewers need to obtain the full text of the articles for a comprehensive assessment against the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. This stage involves meticulously reviewing the full text of each potentially relevant study to determine its eligibility definitively.
3. **Resolution of Disagreements**: In cases of disagreement between reviewers regarding a study's eligibility, a predefined strategy involving consensus-building discussions or arbitration by a third reviewer should be in place to reach a final decision. This collaborative approach ensures a fair and impartial selection process, further strengthening the review's reliability.

Step 4: Evaluating the Quality of Studies

Data collection process

> Specify the methods used to collect data from reports, including how many reviewers collected data from each report, whether they worked independently, any processes for obtaining or confirming data from study investigators, and if applicable, details of automation tools used in the process.
>
> *PRISMA 2020 Checklist*

To gather data for the metasynthesis, researchers identify themes and findings already presented in the qualitative research reports included in the review.

Data extraction focuses on information relevant to the research question, such as risk or recovery factors related to a particular phenomenon.

Data is extracted from the findings, discussion, and conclusions of each primary study, including participant quotes and the authors' interpretations.

It can be useful to focus on the authors' interpretations of findings rather than individual participant quotes, as the latter lacks the full context of the original data.

Quality Appraisal Tools

Both the CASP and QARI tools provide structured approaches to assessing the quality of qualitative studies, helping researchers to make informed decisions about which studies to include in their metasynthesis.

By using these tools, researchers can ensure that the studies included in their analysis are of high quality and contribute meaningful insights to the overall synthesis.

Researchers use tools like the **Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP)** to assess the quality of the qualitative studies included in the metasynthesis.

The **Cochrane Collaboration,** a global independent network of researchers, professionals, and patients, recommends the use of CASP for appraising qualitative studies included in systematic reviews and metasyntheses.

Another quality appraisal tools for meta-synthesis is the **Qualitative Appraisal and Review Instrument (QARI)**.

It was developed by the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI), an international research organization that promotes evidence-based practices in healthcare.

Other quality appaisal tools include: **Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ)**, and **Evaluation Tool for Qualitative Studies (ETQS)**.

Step 5: Extract Data, Including as Themes, Concepts, or Quotes

This step is critical, as it lays the foundation for the subsequent analysis and synthesis of the findings.

The focus during data extraction is identifying and documenting key concepts, themes, or interpretations from each study relevant to the metasynthesis research question.

The following strategies can be used for data extraction:

1. **Develop a data extraction form**: Create a standardized form or template to consistently record the relevant information from each study, such as the study's aim, participants, setting, data collection methods, analysis techniques, and key findings. This structured approach enhances the organization and management of extracted data.
2. **Identify relevant data**: Read through each study carefully, focusing on the results, discussion, and conclusion sections to identify the main themes, concepts, or interpretations that are pertinent to the metasynthesis research question.
3. **Use a coding framework**: Develop a coding framework based on the research question and the initial reading of the studies. This framework can include pre-defined codes or categories, as well as space for emergent codes that arise during the data extraction process.
4. **Extract verbatim quotes**: Identify and extract direct quotations from participants or authors that illustrate the key themes or concepts. These quotes can be used to support the metasynthesis findings and provide rich, contextual data.
5. **Capture author interpretations**: Extract the study authors' interpretations and explanations of the findings, as these can provide valuable insights and contribute to the metasynthesis.
6. **Maintain a clear audit trail**: Document the data extraction process, including any decisions made, to ensure transparency and reproducibility. Maintaining a clear record of the process allows for scrutiny and enhances the credibility of the metasynthesis findings.
7. **Collaborate with other researchers**: Collaboration in data extraction is valuable, as it ensures consistency, minimizes bias, and captures a diverse range of perspectives. Multiple researchers can cross-check the extracted data, ensuring accuracy and reducing the risk of individual biases.

Automation Tools

The extracted data should be organized in a way that facilitates the subsequent analysis and synthesis process, such as using a spreadsheet, qualitative data analysis software, or a structured summary table.

Researchers might record this extracted data using tools like Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. Researchers often use qualitative analysis software like NVivo to organize and code extracted information.

This helps manage the large volume of data from multiple sources.

It is important to strike a balance between capturing the relevant data and maintaining the context and richness of the original studies.

The data extraction process should be iterative, allowing for refinement and modification as the metasynthesis progresses and new insights emerge.

Step 6: Synthesizing Findings

> **Develop a new interpretation**: Synthesize the findings to generate a new understanding or theory that goes beyond the individual studie

The goal of the synthesis step is to produce a meaningful, integrated understanding of the phenomena that goes beyond the sum of its parts.

This involves a thorough analysis of the contextual factors influencing the original studies and carefully considering the relationships between different concepts and themes.

- **Moving Beyond Description:** The most impactful qualitative metasyntheses go beyond simply describing the findings of primary studies. They aim to generate new interpretations, develop theories, or offer practical implications for policy and practice.
- **Diversity of Metasynthesis Approaches:** These approaches, including meta-ethnography, thematic synthesis, grounded theory, and others, each offer different ways of integrating and interpreting qualitative findings. The choice of approach depends on the research question, the nature of the available studies, and the aims of the review.

It's important to note that the synthesis process is iterative and may require multiple rounds of analysis and refinement to arrive at a coherent and well-supported interpretation of the data.

> While there's no standardized protocol, the qualitative synthesis methods often borrow from grounded theory, meta-ethnography, and meta-study:

Meta-ethnography

Meta-ethnography uses a systematic process of comparing conceptual data from different qualitative studies to uncover overarching concepts, theories, and models that go beyond what each individual study could reveal on its own.

The ultimate aim of meta-ethnography is to create **new interpretations** rather than just summarizing the findings of the collected studies. This sets it apart from other qualitative synthesis methods that may focus on aggregating findings without necessarily seeking to build new understanding.

A core principle of meta-ethnography is **translation**, which involves carefully analyzing the interpretations made by the authors of the primary studies, such as the concepts and themes they identified.

This process aims to preserve the original context and meaning of each study's findings while also allowing for comparison and the development of new insights.

Noblit and Hare, who developed meta-ethnography, outlined a seven-stage process.

Grounded Theory

By applying grounded theory to a qualitative metasynthesis, researchers can move beyond a simple aggregation of findings and generate a higher-level understanding of the phenomena being studied.

This approach allows for the development of new theories or the refinement of existing ones based on the collective findings of multiple qualitative studies.

When using grounded theory in a qualitative metasynthesis, the researcher follows these general steps:

1. **Open coding**: Carefully read through the findings and identify key concepts, themes, and categories that emerge from the data.
2. **Constant comparison**: Continuously compare the emerging concepts and categories to identify similarities, differences, and relationships between them.
3. **Axial coding**: Establish connections between the categories and subcategories, developing a more comprehensive understanding of the central phenomena.
4. **Selective coding**: Identify the core category or categories that represent the main theme(s) of the metasynthesis and systematically relate them to other categories.
5. **Theory development**: Develop a theoretical framework that explains the relationships between the categories and provides a coherent understanding of the phenomena under study.

Meta-Study

A meta-study involves the systematic analysis of a collection of related studies, with the aim of identifying common themes, patterns, and conclusions across the included research.

When applied to a metasynthesis, a meta-study can help to further synthesize and integrate the findings that have already been identified through the metasynthesis process.

The researcher moves beyond the individual findings and themes identified in the primary sources and works to integrate and synthesize them into a coherent, higher-level understanding of the phenomena under study.

This process involves examining the relationships, patterns, and connections between the various themes and concepts, and considering how they contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

The synthesis process in a meta-study of metasyntheses may involve:

1. **Identifying overarching themes**: The researcher looks for higher-order themes or concepts that encompass and connect the various findings and themes identified in the coding process. These overarching themes represent the core ideas or principles that emerge from the collective findings of the included metasyntheses.

2. **Developing a theoretical framework**: Based on the overarching themes and the relationships between them, the researcher may develop a new theoretical framework or model that explains the phenomena under study. This framework should integrate the key findings and insights from the included metasyntheses and provide a novel, comprehensive understanding of the research topic.
3. **Comparing with existing literature**: The researcher may also compare the emerging themes and theoretical framework with existing literature and theories in the field. This process can help to situate the findings within the broader context of the discipline and highlight how the meta-study contributes to or challenges current understanding.
4. **Considering implications**: As part of the synthesis process, the researcher may also consider the practical, methodological, and theoretical implications of the findings. This may involve discussing how the findings can inform policy, practice, or future research in the field.

Step 7: Present Synthesis of Findings Across Studies

When presenting the synthesis of findings across studies, consider the audience and use visuals such as charts, tables, and figures to represent the findings graphically.

Numbers can also be used, but it is important to present rich descriptions of the data, quotations, and the development of the conceptual model or working hypotheses drawn from the integration.

Disseminate the results: Share the metasynthesis findings through publications, presentations, or other means to contribute to the broader understanding of the topic.

The presentation of findings should include:

- **Introduction**: Describe the problem and purpose.
- **Methods**: Explain the sampling strategy, techniques and tools for appraising and comparing reports, classifying and synthesizing findings, and validity procedures.
- **Results**: Present the findings from the analysis and synthesis.
- **Discussion**: Explain the significance of the findings and connect findings back to the existing literature. Include limitations, strengths, and implications of the findings for research, practice, and policy.

Reporting Guidelines

PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) is a widely used reporting guideline for systematic reviews and meta-analyses of quantitative studies.

Although primarily intended for quantitative research synthesis, certain aspects of PRISMA, such as guidelines for reporting literature searches and selection strategies, can be applied to qualitative evidence synthesis as well.

However, PRISMA is not designed to address the specific reporting requirements of qualitative synthesis methods like meta-ethnography

eMERGe (enhancing Meta-Ethnography Reporting Guidance) is a reporting guideline specifically designed for meta-ethnography.

This type of qualitative synthesis uses interpretive methods to translate findings from multiple studies into a new, overarching understanding of a phenomenon.

Because of the unique interpretive processes involved, generic guidelines for qualitative synthesis, like ENTREQ, are insufficient for meta-ethnography, as they don't address the complex analytical synthesis phases.

eMERGe was developed to address this gap and to improve the transparency and completeness of meta-ethnography reporting.

Ensuring Validity and Reliability

> Ensuring the validity and reliability of a metasynthesis is crucial for producing high-quality, trustworthy findings that can contribute to the advancement of knowledge in a field.

1. Transparency and Rigor in Reporting

Transparency in reporting is essential for ensuring the validity and reliability of a metasynthesis.

Researchers should provide a clear and detailed description of their methods, including the search strategy, inclusion and exclusion criteria, quality appraisal process, and data analysis techniques.

This transparency allows other researchers to assess the rigor of the metasynthesis and replicate the study if needed.

Researchers should also be transparent about their decision-making processes throughout the synthesis, such as how they resolved disagreements among the research team or how they handled conflicting findings from different studies.

Providing a clear audit trail of the research process enhances the credibility and trustworthiness of the metasynthesis findings.

Strategies for Achieving Transparency and Rigor:

- **Maintaining an Audit Trail:** Documenting all decisions made throughout the research process, including rationales for inclusion and exclusion criteria, data analysis techniques, and interpretation of findings.
- **Negotiating Consensus Among the Research Team:** Engaging in discussions and reaching agreement on key decisions to mitigate the influence of individual biases.
- **Consulting with Experts:** Seeking input from information retrieval specialists, methodological experts, and practitioners to enhance the rigor and relevance of the metasynthesis.
- **Contacting Study Authors (If Needed):** Communicating with authors of the primary studies to clarify ambiguous findings or gather missing information.
- **Using Reporting Guidelines:** Following established reporting guidelines, such as ENTREQ (Enhancing Transparency in Reporting the Synthesis of Qualitative Research) or PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses), helps ensure comprehensive and transparent reporting.
- **Publishing the Protocol:** Publishing the study protocol in a publicly accessible repository, like PROSPERO (Prospective Register of Systematic Reviews), promotes transparency and allows for scrutiny of the research plan.

2. Use of Established Methods

Using established, well-recognized methods for conducting a metasynthesis can help ensure its validity and reliability.

Researchers should follow a systematic approach, such as the steps outlined by Noblit and Hare (1988) or the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) methodology for qualitative synthesis.

These established methods provide a structured framework for conducting the synthesis, including guidelines for formulating the research question, searching and selecting studies, appraising study quality, extracting and analyzing data, and presenting the findings.

By adhering to these established methods, researchers can ensure that their metasynthesis is conducted in a rigorous and standardized manner, enhancing its validity and reliability.

3. Reflexivity of Researchers

Reflexivity is a critical aspect of ensuring the validity and reliability of a metasynthesis. Researchers should be aware of their own background, assumptions, and biases and how these may influence their interpretations and conclusions.

Engaging in reflexivity involves continuously examining one's own role in the research process, questioning one's assumptions, and considering alternative explanations for the findings.

Researchers should document their reflexive processes, such as keeping a reflexive journal or engaging in peer debriefing, to enhance the transparency and trustworthiness of the metasynthesis.

Reflexivity also involves being open to alternative interpretations and seeking out disconfirming evidence that may challenge one's initial conclusions.

By actively engaging in reflexivity throughout the synthesis process, researchers can minimize the influence of their own biases and ensure that the findings are grounded in the data rather than their preconceptions.

Considerations for Reflexivity:

- The order in which studies were incorporated into the metasynthesis
- How study selection and sampling influenced the findings
- The number of studies included, as a large volume of data may impact the depth of analysis
- The context of the metasynthesis
- Modifications made to Noblit and Hare's (1988) original methodology

Reviewers conducting a metasynthesis should explicitly describe the influence of these factors on their conclusions.

For instance, if a large number of studies were synthesized, the reviewers should detail how they preserved conceptual richness and remained grounded in the data, such as translating studies in smaller clusters.

Advanages

Qualitative metasynthesis offers a valuable approach to strengthening and deepening the understanding of a particular field of study, such as early childhood intervention.

This systematic process of analyzing and interpreting data across qualitative studies provides a unique and important contribution to bridging the gap between research and practice1.

- **Enhanced Understanding and Knowledge Development:** Qualitative metasynthesis goes beyond simply summarizing the findings of individual studies to interpret patterns and insights across investigations, offering a richer, more complete, and conceptually robust understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. This method can identify common themes, compare and contrast different perspectives, and generate new theoretical insights or practical implications.
- **Increased Generalizability:** While individual qualitative studies are often limited in their generalizability due to factors such as sample size and context, metasynthesis enables researchers to synthesize findings from multiple studies, potentially leading to more generalizable conclusions. By integrating findings from studies conducted in diverse settings and with different populations, metasynthesis can provide broader insights into the phenomenon of interest.
- **Identification of Research Gaps and Future Directions:** By systematically reviewing the existing body of qualitative research on a specific topic, metasynthesis can help researchers identify gaps and omissions in the literature, highlighting areas where further investigation is needed. This, in turn, can inform future research agendas and guide the development of new interventions or policies.
- **Enhanced Impact on Policy and Practice:** By synthesizing qualitative research findings in a rigorous and accessible manner, metasynthesis can provide a strong foundation for evidence-based practice and policy development. For example, metasynthesis can inform the development, implementation, and evaluation of support strategies or interventions.

- **Integration of Diverse Perspectives:** Qualitative metasynthesis allows researchers to consider and integrate the beliefs, values, and experiences of various stakeholders, including families, practitioners, administrators, policy makers, and researchers. This can lead to more comprehensive and nuanced understandings of complex issues.

Advantages Over Other Research Methods:

- Unlike **narrative literature reviews**, **qualitative metasynthesis** employs systematic and rigorous methods to analyze and synthesize research findings. This systematic approach enhances the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings.
- Unlike **qualitative secondary analysis**, which involves re-analyzing raw data from primary qualitative studies, **qualitative metasynthesis** focuses on analyzing and interpreting the findings and interpretations presented in published research reports.
- Unlike **meta-analysis**, which is designed for quantitative studies, **qualitative metasynthesis** uses interpretive methods to synthesize findings from qualitative research, allowing for a deeper exploration of the meaning and complexity of human experiences

Disadvantages

- **Oversimplification and Decontextualization:** Qualitative metasyntheses may result in findings being stripped of the critical context found in the original qualitative studies, sacrificing the rich description central to qualitative research.

  Combining many studies in a qualitative metasynthesis may also create a superficial synthesis that loses grounding in the detailed study accounts3. To address this issue, researchers suggest providing a framework with contextual information about the setting and participants of the studies included in the metasynthesis2.
- **Misrepresentation of Original Studies:** Trying to summarize the findings of qualitative studies in a metasynthesis may be inappropriate both epistemologically and ethically, as it risks misrepresenting the potential value of a body of research on health and illness.
- **Limited Impact on Policy and Practice:** If a systematic process for integrating and synthesizing qualitative studies is not implemented, significant bodies of research may have limited influence on policy and practice.

- **Difficulty in Setting Boundaries:** Due to the open-ended nature of qualitative studies, the permeable boundaries around the types of phenomena they examine can make setting limits on a metasynthesis challenging.

  The broad nature of metasynthesis findings doesn't offer much insight into how to predict specific phenomena like male suicide, and the findings often overlap with those for other phenomena like depression or addiction

Further Reading

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