

Diversity of reviewers helps to mitigate the underrepresentation of minority and marginalised perspectives in primary studies – experiences from the EPPI-Centre

The problem:

Lack of diversity of participants and researchers in primary research is a well-known problem for systematic reviews; it impedes efforts to address **health inequalities and the needs of minority and marginalised groups**.

Whilst stakeholder involvement may help to alleviate this problem, an additional approach may be to **enhance diversity among systematic review teams**.

Method:

We drew on the theory of **team science** to understand how collaborative efforts harnessing the diverse experiences, skills and expertise among our review team have proven beneficial:

- for addressing a wide range of issues
- for considering diversity and inequalities in our reviews.

We present several **case examples** to illustrate our findings.

Key findings:

We identified **three different dimensions of diversity** among the team that have enabled valuable insights in our reviews:

Socio-demographic diversity: Our team is diverse in terms of age, gender, ethnicity and sexuality. This has helped to provide new perspectives in relation to health inequalities.

- e.g., in a review on the prevalence of mental health conditions in adult minority ethnic groups, the insights of a minority ethnic researcher proved valuable regarding the sensitivity of terminology and ethnic categorisation. This diversity has also ensured that the team has sought funding to address issues faced by marginalised groups such as health among older LGBTQ people.

Transdisciplinary diversity: **Pairing experts with non-experts** is beneficial for **clear communication** in reviews.

- e.g., a review on the cost effectiveness of sexual health interventions benefited from reviewers with training in health economics working alongside reviewers who were new to this area. This combination helped to ensure that findings were written in plain language and thus accessible to stakeholders unfamiliar with the terminology.

It is also beneficial in **reviews that cover broad and complex areas**.

- e.g., an evidence map on community pharmacy covered more than 20 health conditions. This map benefited from reviewers with a range of subject specific (e.g. pharmacy, public health etc.) or condition specific (e.g. diabetes, stroke etc.) knowledge when writing up the report.

Transdisciplinary diversity has also allowed the team to **conduct reviews on a wide range of issues within public health, education, social justice and more**. Team members with **practice-based knowledge** (e.g. midwifery, pharmacy etc.) have provided valuable insight with regards to understanding how the review findings **can help support implementation** in practice.

Methodological diversity: Reviewers in our team have wide-ranging methodological skill sets from within the **qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods** research.

Objective: to describe the benefits of transdisciplinary systematic review teams comprising reviewers from diverse backgrounds.
Stakeholder involvement: Stakeholder involvement was conducted for all the example reviews. This included: consultations with policy teams and advisory groups
Relevance to diversity: Ensuring diversity of backgrounds in a review team aims to ensure diverse researcher perspectives in the design, execution and reporting of systematic reviews. We argue that research teams with a variety of disciplinary specialisms, ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientation and gender, provide improved understanding to reviews via access to diverse skill sets and life experiences.
Relevance to patients and consumers: We suggest that the use of diverse and transdisciplinary review teams might benefit patients and healthcare consumers by adding greater understanding to research findings, thus generate research evidence that has greater relevance to patient contexts. Particularly, where the review being undertaken covers broad issues that span disciplinary boundaries, and in situations where diversity of stakeholders cannot be achieved.



Next steps

A qualitative study and survey on the composition of systematic review teams and the types of research questions being addressed over the past five years.

Conclusion: Though patient or consumer involvement goes some way to address diversity in research, **diversity of reviewers helps to:**

- mitigate the underrepresentation of minority and marginalised perspectives in primary studies;
- address researcher bias;
- triangulate perspectives;
- ensure academic voice in research is representative and inclusive;
- and produce more balanced research based on experiential and professional knowledge.

Title: Diversity in reviewers: diverse researcher perspectives in systematic reviews may help to reduce potential researcher bias and improve reporting

Stokes G, Kneale D, Sutcliffe K, EPPI-Centre, Department of Social Science, University College London, UK

The Department of Health and Social Care Policy Reviews Facility - a collaboration between three centres of excellence