

SWAR 08: Finding eligible studies efficiently

Objective of this SWAR

To examine the sources of eligible studies, and the most efficient use of those sources.

Study area: Study Identification

Sample type: Reviewers

Estimated funding level needed: Very Low

Background

Published guidance on the conduct of systematic reviews provide a wealth of assistance in choosing search sources.[1, 2] However, there is little evidence available about the efficiency of searching different sources.[3, 4] The efficient use of sources is particularly important for reviews with limited time resources, search strategies low in specificity or when seeking to answer research questions for which the evidence may develop rapidly. This SWAR provides a framework for presenting descriptive analyses of the yield from the different sources searched during a systematic review.

Interventions and comparators

Intervention 1: This study is an observational study, where the “interventions” are the sources searched for potentially eligible studies for a systematic review.

Index Type:

Method for allocating to intervention or comparator

Outcome measures

Primary: The sources searched and, for each, the total number of search results, and the number of eligible studies identified. The results can be recorded in a template.

Secondary:

Analysis plans

The data collected for this SWAR for each review could be published alongside the example search strategy required by the PRISMA reporting guidelines.[5] These results might also be collated in a publicly accessible database such as the PROSPERO registration.[6] This will allow future reviewers to compare published reviews and sources of eligible studies with their planned review and take a more informed decision when choosing which sources to use.

Possible problems in implementing this SWAR

The simplest way to carry out a systematic review is to use reference management software to delete duplicate search results. However, in order to gather data for this review, all results are required so that all the sources of each study can be analysed and presented. Therefore, the easiest way to conduct this SWAR may be to repeat the search, or to start by creating two identical reference libraries, only one of which has duplicate results removed. The data generated for each review may be specific to certain subjects, or to certain combinations of subjects, and not applicable to reviews in other areas. The more reviewers collect and publish this data as a part of their reviews, the more useful the collected data will be; this SWAR will have limited value if it is conducted in a small number of reviews, or in few types of review question.

References

1. Higgins J, Green S, editors. Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell; 2008.
2. CRD. Systematic reviews: CRD's guidance for undertaking reviews in health care [3rd edition]. York: Centre for Reviews and Dissemination; 2009.
3. Booth A: How much searching is enough? Comprehensive versus optimal retrieval for technology assessments. International Journal of Technology Assessment in Health Care 2010; 26:431-5.
4. Ross-White A, Godfrey C: Is there an optimum number needed to retrieve to justify inclusion of a database in a systematic review search? Health Information & Libraries Journal 2017; 34:217-24.

5. Liberati A, Altman DG, Tetzlaff J, et al. The PRISMA Statement for reporting systematic reviews and meta-analyses of studies that evaluate health care interventions: explanation and elaboration. *PLoS Medicine* 2009;6(7):e1000100.
6. Booth A, Clarke M, Dooley G, et al. PROSPERO at one year: an evaluation of its utility. *Systematic Reviews* 2013;2(1):4.

Publications or presentations of this SWAR design

Burrow R. Sensitivity and specificity of molecular methods for detecting markers of antimalarial drug resistance in clinical samples of *Plasmodium falciparum*: a systematic review [Submitted]. In Department of Continuing Education: University of Oxford; 2017.

Examples of the implementation of this SWAR

Burrow R. Sensitivity and specificity of molecular methods for detecting markers of antimalarial drug resistance in clinical samples of *Plasmodium falciparum*: a systematic review [Submitted]. In Department of Continuing Education: University of Oxford; 2017.

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