Which Method, Which Deliverable?

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Confusing Terminology, Variety of Choices

- Qualitative Systematic Review
- Qualitative Meta-Synthesis
- Qualitative Research Synthesis

**Qualitative Evidence Synthesis**

- Best Fit *Synthesis*
- Critical Interpretive *Synthesis*
- Framework *Synthesis*
- Meta-Aggregation
- Meta-Ethnography
- Meta-Interpretation
- Meta-Narrative
- Meta-Study
- Meta-Summary
- Narrative *Synthesis*
- Qualitative Meta-Synthesis
- Realist *Synthesis*
- Thematic *Synthesis*
Figure 1 – Methodologies for synthesizing Scientific Evidence, according to quantitative or qualitative approach – São Paulo – 2010

Acknowledgement to Cecilia De-la-Torre-Ugarte-Guanilo
http://www.scielo.br/img/revistas/reeusp/v45n5/en_a33fig1.jpg
Decision Tree for Choosing a Method for Qualitative Synthesis

With Acknowledgement to Michael Saini
Bad Reasons for Choosing Method

• Frequency of Use of Method (e.g. Meta-Ethnography)
• Popularity/”Sexiness” of Method (e.g. Realist Synthesis)
• What a friend/colleague/mentor has used (once!)
• Bad experiences of others (may have been inappropriate!)
Good Reasons for Choosing Method

- Type of Question
- Extent of Description versus Interpretation
- Role of Theory
- Type of Data
- Intended Output
- By Examining Methods Overviews and Published Examples

Other Considerations:
Methodological Expertise in Team
Available Resources
Is Your Question......

• **Fixed?** – Pre-defined as a PICO (Population-Intervention-Comparison-Outcome) or SPICE (Setting-Perspective-Interest, Phenomenon of – Comparison-Evaluation) – Question is an “Anchor”

• *(e.g. attached to an Effectiveness review)*

• **Negotiable?** – To be explored as part of initial review process – Becomes clearer as you examine data (cp. Grounded theory approaches) – Question is a “Compass”

• *NB. Even answering a fixed PICO question for HTAs may require exploration of phenomenon of untreated/pretreated condition (Lorenc et al, 2012)*
Will You Describe or Interpret?

All Reviews figure on a continuum between **Description** and **Interpretation**

- **Description** – What does the data say? – factual reporting of “epidemiology” of studies, themes etc...
- **Reader** does work of interpretation

- **Interpretation** – What does the data mean? – “diagnosis” – subjective interpretation of “signs and symptoms” from data and themes etc...
- **Reviewer** does work of interpretation – may be contested
Decision Tree for Choosing a Method for Qualitative Synthesis

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Aggregative, Interpretive or Integrative?

• **Aggregative** – ("Every study counts") – for mapping, barriers and facilitators etc – e.g. Meta-Aggregation, Thematic Synthesis etc

• **Interpretive** – (Different perspectives, rounded out understanding) – to create models, possible explanations – e.g. Grounded Theory, Meta-Ethnography

**Integrative** – (Relating effectiveness and acceptability) – to answer what works, for whom, under what circumstances – e.g. EPPI-Centre Methods, Narrative Synthesis, Realist Synthesis
Will You Generate, Explore, Test Theory (Gough et al, 2012)?

- **Generate** – may require “suspension of disbelief” – quality assessment/value judgement may come later (cp. Brainstorming) - **Grounded Theory, Meta-ethnography**
- **Explore** – looking for patterns - **Narrative Synthesis, Thematic Synthesis**
- **Test** – quality assessment differentiates well-supported and unsupported data - **Framework Synthesis** (incl. **Best Fit Synthesis**
How Rich (“Thick”) is Your Data?

• Qualitative data from “thin” studies (or textual responses to surveys) will not sustain interpretive approaches

• Limited to Meta-Aggregation, Thematic Synthesis, Framework Synthesis, Narrative Synthesis –type approaches

• Rich/“Thick” reports will sustain Meta-Ethnography/Grounded Theory – may allow selective sampling/theoretical saturation

• NB. Is “Unit of Analysis” Individual Study (Meta-Aggregation, Thematic Synthesis) or “Body of Evidence” (e.g. Meta-Narrative or Critical Interpretive Synthesis approaches) or even Theory (Framework Synthesis/Best Fit Synthesis)?
What is Your Intended Output?

• “output of some methods of synthesis (Thematic Synthesis, textual Narrative Synthesis, Framework Synthesis, and ecological triangulation) is more directly relevant to policymakers and designers of interventions than the outputs of methods with a more constructivist orientation (Meta-Study, Meta-Narrative, Meta-Ethnography, Grounded Theory, CIS) which are generally more complex and conceptual” (Barnett-Page & Thomas, 2009)

• Thematic Synthesis (including Meta-Aggregation) and Framework Synthesis produce findings that directly inform practitioners (Thomas & Harden, 2009)

• Interpretive approaches (e.g. CIS, Meta-Ethnography) produce a model that requires practitioners to interpret relevance and applicability to their own context

• Narrative Synthesis or EPPI-Centre (matrix) methods may help to integrate and present quantitative/qualitative work
What Expertise Can You Access?

- **Expertise in Qualitative Research Methods** (e.g. Grounded Theory; Framework Analysis, Thematic Analysis)
  - **Expertise in Synthesis Methods** (incl. Searching, Data Extraction, Quality Assessment, Interpretation)
- **Knowledge of Topic Area**
How Long?/How Much Have You Got?

• “Richer” approaches make fuller use of data – require fewer studies

• Meta-Aggregation, Thematic Synthesis can handle large numbers of studies

32 papers (775 patients and carers) reporting help-seeking experiences for at least 20 different types of cancer.
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<th>If...</th>
<th>Then...</th>
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<tr>
<td>• There is a <strong>Pre-existing Theory or Framework</strong>....</td>
<td>• ...<strong>Framework Synthesis</strong> (including Best Fit Synthesis)</td>
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<th>If...</th>
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<tr>
<td>• There is <strong>No Theory or Framework</strong>...</td>
<td>• ...<strong>Thematic Synthesis</strong> <em>(Can also act as first stage of Meta-Ethnography)</em></td>
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Some Examples
The Scenario

HTA Report – Systematic Review, Modelling & Qualitative Synthesis on Group Therapy for Postnatal Depression (UK)


The Choice

• **Type of Question** – Acceptability of Intervention
• **Extent of Description versus Interpretation** – Factors Making Group Therapy More or Less Acceptable (Descriptive)
• **Role of Theory** – No Theory – Trying to separate Group Effect from Therapy Effect
• **Type of Data** – Very Thin Data, Small Number of Studies \((n = 6)\) – Descriptive Case Study Accounts in Nursing Journals
• **Intended Output** – Alongside Effectiveness Review & Cost Effectiveness Study – for Implementation

**Other Considerations:**

*Methodological Expertise in Team* – Novice Reviewer
*Available Resources* – Limited Time in Comparison to “Main” Review

*Choice = Thematic Synthesis*
The Contribution

• While Group Therapy is Acceptable on Average there are some for whom it is unfavourable because:
  – **Group Comparison** – Some People are Getting Better Quicker than I am
  – **Group Comparison** – Ms. X has been Coming Here longer than I am and still is not any better

• **Identified Key Issue**: Identification of those Most Likely to Benefit.
The Scenario

**Aim:** To analyse the meaning and motivation of the Wish To Hasten Death in patients with chronic illness or advanced disease

The Choice

• **Type of Question** – Explanatory
• **Extent of Description versus Interpretation** – Factors that Help to Explain a Phenomenon (Interpretative)
• **Role of Theory** – Theory Generation
• **Type of Data** – Contextually Rich – Qualitative Research Reports – Thick Data [NB. 7 studies]
• **Intended Output** – Stand Alone Research Report for Enlightenment

**Other Considerations:**

*Methodological Expertise in Team* – Large Experienced Team with Qualitative Researcher

*Available Resources* – Extant Funded Project

*Choice = Meta-Ethnography*
The Contribution

• Synthesis suggests that the wish to hasten death (WTHD) is a multifactorial construct with multiple meanings that do not necessarily imply a genuine desire to hasten one's death or actually taking steps towards this.

• Rather, it is a phenomenon that appears, among patients in the advanced stages of illness, as response to extreme suffering that affects all aspects of their human existence.
References - 1


• Booth, A, Papaioannou, D and Sutton, A J (2011). *Systematic Approaches to a Successful Literature Review*. SAGE publications


• Thomas J, Harden A (2009) Methods for the thematic synthesis of qualitative research in systematic reviews, BMC Medical Research Methodology 8:45