












BMJ Open Identifying priority questions regarding rapid systematic reviews' methods: protocol for an eDelphi study

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To cite: Vieira AM, Szczepanik G, de Waure C, *et al.* Identifying priority questions regarding rapid systematic reviews' methods: protocol for an eDelphi study. *BMJ Open* 2023;**13**:e069856. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2022-069856

► Prepublication history and additional supplemental material for this paper are available online. To view these files, please visit the journal online (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2022-069856>).

Received 04 November 2022
Accepted 22 June 2023



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ABSTRACT

Introduction Rapid systematic reviews (RRs) have the potential to provide timely information to decision-makers, thus directly impacting healthcare. However, consensus regarding the most efficient approaches to performing RRs and the presence of several unaddressed methodological issues pose challenges. With such a large potential research agenda for RRs, it is unclear what should be prioritised.

Objective To elicit a consensus from RR experts and interested parties on what are the most important methodological questions (from the generation of the question to the writing of the report) for the field to address in order to guide the effective and efficient development of RRs.

Methods and analysis An eDelphi study will be conducted. Researchers with experience in evidence synthesis and other interested parties (eg, knowledge users, patients, community members, policymaker, industry, journal editors and healthcare providers) will be invited to participate. The following steps will be taken: (1) a core group of experts in evidence synthesis will generate the first list of items based on the available literature; (2) using LimeSurvey, participants will be invited to rate and rank the importance of suggested RR methodological questions. Questions with open format responses will allow for modifications to the wording of items or the addition of new items; (3) three survey rounds will be performed asking participants to re-rate items, with items deemed of low importance being removed at each round; (4) a list of items will be generated with items believed to be of high importance by ≥75% of participants being included and (5) this list will be discussed at an online consensus meeting that will generate a summary document containing the final priority list. Data analysis will be performed using raw numbers, means and frequencies.

Ethics and dissemination This study was approved by the Concordia University Human Research Ethics Committee (#30015229). Both traditional, for example, scientific conference presentations and publication in scientific journals, and non-traditional, for example, lay summaries and infographics, knowledge translation products will be created.

BACKGROUND

Evidence syntheses (eg, systematic reviews (SRs)) are a useful strategy for a number of uses and domains, notably to summarise

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

- ⇒ The eDelphi process is a well-recognised and highly structured method for consensus building.
- ⇒ Understanding potential differences in research priorities will be made possible by including a variety of participant profiles, researchers and key end users (such as policy-makers, guideline producers, healthcare professionals, etc).
- ⇒ The modified eDelphi approach, using an online format, although it may elicit challenges, can also allow for faster data collection, a broader range of individuals across the globe, is more cost-effective than in-person Delphi approaches and is less susceptible to the judgements of group members with higher status.
- ⇒ Although this study is an important addition to the literature in the evidence-synthesis field, and it can serve as a 'road-map' for future rapid systematic review (RR) methodological studies, it is only the first step towards refining the conduct of RRs in a more time-efficient way.

evidence around a specific question.¹ In a health context, findings from SRs have been used to make decisions for: clinical practice, normally through clinical practice guidelines; healthcare systems and shaping policy.^{1 2} However, conducting a full SR is time-consuming, sometimes taking up to 2 years to conduct,³ by which time the scientific literature may have already moved on, and expensive, with an estimated cost of at least US\$100 000 needed for a high-quality SR.^{4 5}

To address the challenges of SRs, the concept of rapid evidence products has been introduced, including inventories, rapid response briefs and rapid systematic reviews (RRs).⁶ RRs result from an evidence synthesis approach that uses streamlined procedures,^{7 8} so certain methodological elements are simplified or omitted compared with SRs.⁹ Currently, RRs are being conducted to answer

urgent questions and/or to support decisions where there is limited time and/or resources, that is, in situations where time-efficiency and cost-efficiency are key.^{10 11} For example, RRs have been extensively used in addressing issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic.^{8 12} Preliminary evidence suggests that the conclusions reached by RRs are typically consistent with those of SRs.¹⁰ In addition, when applied to policy decision-based health technology assessment reports, RRs have been shown to positively impact the healthcare system, resulting in a reduction of expenditures.^{13 14}

The use of high-quality evidence summary methods is essential to providing reliable results. For traditional SRs, there are well-defined, prespecified methods, for example, for conducting searches, selecting relevant studies, appraising their quality and synthesising the available evidence to answer the research question, which ensure quality and reduce bias.³ However, though methodological rigour and transparency are still essential to have representative and reliable results in RRs,⁸ there is a lack of standardised methodologies on how to adapt SR methods to be able to reliably perform an RR.^{15 16} Several studies and reviews,¹⁵⁻¹⁷ have noted this lack of consensus in the methodological approaches being used for RRs, highlighting heterogeneous nomenclature and terminology being used to describe the same concepts, and the use of varied methodologies without a clear rationale behind the choices being made.

In 2017, the WHO commissioned a guide on how to perform RRs, which explored various approaches. The guide emphasised that methods can be simplified at any stage of the review process and that decisions should consider the resources at hand and be customised to the needs of the decision-makers.⁶ The Cochrane Initiative has also produced some methodological guidance for RRs,¹⁸ but the impact and costs of each approach are still unclear. Evidence Synthesis Ireland, using the James Lind Alliance method, identified RR research priorities.¹⁹ Among the top ten questions generated, three focused on methodological issues but in relatively broad categories.

The current study will build on the findings from Evidence Synthesis Ireland by further exploring more focused questions around RRs methods, that is, the stages between question generation and report writing. The identification of these unanswered questions is required to design and develop methodological studies that can then inform the conduct of RRs. For example, questions about how many databases should be included, database search limitations, and if peer review is necessary for all steps have not yet been answered. Given the number of areas that still need to be explored, the small amount of current available evidence, the limited available resources to conduct methodological studies, and the lack of general consensus on where to start, the aim of this project is to elicit a consensus from RR experts and interested parties on what are the most important methodological questions to improve time-efficiency of RRs,

and, ultimately, create a prioritised research agenda for the field to address.

OBJECTIVES

- ▶ To identify and compile the main unanswered questions related to the methods used in conducting time-efficiency RRs, specifically from the stage after generating the research question to just before writing the final report.
- ▶ To create a priority list of the most crucial questions regarding RRs methods that need to be addressed.

METHODS

The study will follow the general eDelphi process²⁰⁻²² and the guidance on Conducting and REporting DELphi Studies.²³ There will be an initial generation of potential research areas, followed by multiple rounds of an online survey for ranking, and then a final consensus meeting. The eDelphi process is particularly useful in surveying areas of uncertainty and obtaining consensus.^{20 24} This method has the advantage of enabling each participant to express views impersonally, it is low resource and flexible,²⁵ and it has been widely used in health research.²⁶ After ethical approval, the study will start in March 2022, with the first survey round starting in June 2022 and the last round in being finalised in January 2023. The consensus meeting will then occur in the period of June to September 2023.

Given the focus on efficiency, rather than just quality, the eDelphi will ask participants to answer: 'How important would answering this question be to improve the time-efficiency (balance between the time taken and the quality of the final results) of a systematic RR in a particular field?'

Participants

The sample will consist of two key groups: international experts who have published RRs or undertaken methodological research in RRs and knowledge synthesis; and key end-users. To standardise the level of expertise, all experts will self-identify, answering eligibility questions, on the basis of having: verifiable experience in designing or delivering evidence summary research; participation in at least one RR; having ≥ 5 years of research experience; and self-rating their knowledge on evidence synthesis as ≥ 7 on a 0 (no expertise) to 10 (expert) point Likert-like scale. We will also include interested parties (eg, guideline and policy developers, end-users (public and patients), industry members and journal editors) who have had previous experiences in participating in any aspect of evidence synthesis.

A recruitment email will be distributed by our global partners through their contacts lists, for example, the International Behavioural Trials Network (IBTN, <https://www.ibtnetwork.org/>), the Strategy for Patient-Oriented Research (SPOR) Evidence Alliance (<https://sporevidencealliance.ca/>), COVID-END ([2](https://www.</p></div><div data-bbox=)

mcmasterforum.org/networks/covid-end). In addition, as performed by Tricco *et al*¹⁵ organisations that produce RRs, identified through the International Network of Agencies for Health Technology Assessment's (<https://www.inahta.org/>) list, will be asked to distribute the study invitation to members of their group. The recruitment email will provide a link to access the information about the study and the consent form. There are no restrictions on the country of origin of the participants, but all study-related information will be provided in English.

Providing consent

The informed consent forms will explain the objective, procedures and other details that are important to participants (online supplemental material). Participants will be asked to read the ethics board-approved information/consent forms and provide agreement by checking a box confirming that they have: reviewed the information/consent form; consent to participate in the survey, and understand that their participation is voluntary and entirely confidential. The contact details of study team members will be listed in the information/consent form in case they have queries. There will be two consent forms, one for the eDelphi rounds and one for the consensus meeting. LimeSurvey, will be used to obtain consent, as well as to distribute the surveys.

Initial topic generation

A core group of experts in evidence synthesis, mainly within the biomedical sciences, referred to as the Central Scientific Committee (CSC), and drawn from the leadership of the SPOR Evidence Alliance, IBTN, COVID-END and notable published scholars, will generate a list of methodological questions that they think are relevant to RRs. The items will be specific and focused, in order to be able to generate specific research questions rather than broad conceptual areas.

The included topics will cover the period after the review question has been generated and before the creation of the final report, for example, search strategy, studies selection (level one and two screening), data extraction, risk of bias appraisal and synthesis. The item list will also be drawn from the WHO guide for RRs,⁶ the Delphi process on RR methods,¹⁵ and the Priority III study¹⁹ to form the initial 'long-list' of items.

This phase of the study will take around 3 months to ensure the inclusion of as many appropriate items as possible.

Online survey

The eDelphi process will involve approximately 50 RRs experts and end-users, who will be asked to complete at least three rounds of online questionnaires, spaced around 1 month apart. Each survey round will be open for about 5 weeks, sufficient time for participants to complete it. A system will tag data to individuals and provide them with their scores from previous rounds, while also reporting the summated data.

Table 1 Classification of the items

Importance level	Conceptualisation
Low importance	Item is helpful to understand how to improve the time-efficiency (balance between the time taken and the quality of the final results) of a rapid systematic review
Medium importance	Item is desirable to understand how to improve the time-efficiency (balance between the time taken and the quality of the final results) of a rapid systematic review
High importance	Item is essential to understand how to improve the time-efficiency (balance between the time taken and the quality of the final results) of a rapid systematic review

Prior to round 1

The initial survey will include basic demographic information, including eligibility questions (ie, years of experience, job title, country and province of residence, age group and sex). Once they agree to participate in the study, participants will be provided with more specific sociodemographic questions (online supplemental material) and the 'long-list' of survey items from the previous phase.²⁷ We will only provide the survey to those agreeing to participate to prevent attrition biases.²⁸

Round 1

As per our previous eDelphi projects (eg, Dragomir *et al*²⁹), participants will rate the importance of suggested items ('How important would answering this question be to improve the time-efficiency—balance between the time taken and the quality of the final results—of a RR in a particular field?'), focusing on the concept, rather than on the wording. Importance can be rated as: low; medium or high (table 1). For all items that an individual rates as high importance, they will be asked to rank them in order of priority (1=highest priority, 2=2nd highest, etc) until all items are ranked. Specific questions with open format responses will allow for modifications to the concept of items. Participants will also be able to add new items that they believe were missing in the initial round.

Responses will be collated and summarised.²⁶ Any items rated as low by 50% or more of the participants will be excluded, a consensus threshold that is similar to those adopted in other Delphi studies.^{24 29} As this is the first round, the threshold will be lower than the following rounds. The CSC will review comments and make necessary changes to items or add new relevant items.

Round 2

Participants will be provided with the percentage of respondents ranking each item as high priority, as well as their ratings in the previous round. They will be able to re-rate the perceived importance of each item, as well as the importance of any new items. They will also be asked whether they agree with items excluded from round 1 or

if any essential items are still missing. The items for which $\geq 75\%$ of people disagree with the exclusion of will remain on the main list for the next round. For all items that an individual rates as high importance, they will be asked to rank them in order of priority (1=highest priority, 2=2nd highest, etc) until all items are ranked. Items rated as low by 75% or more of the participants in round 2 will be excluded.²⁹

As in round 1, open-format questions will allow suggestions for modifications to the items or the addition of new items. The comments will be reviewed by the CSC and changes or additions will be made as needed.

Round 3

A summary of round 2 will be provided, including the percentage of respondents rating each item as high priority, as well as their own rating. Participants will re-rate and re-rank the remaining items. After round 3, we will generate a final list of items for discussion at the consensus meeting (those believed to be of high importance by $\geq 75\%$ of participants). Three rounds should allow us to reach stability and agreement about most items.^{28 30} Information about deviant cases will be shared with the consensus group.²⁷

Security of the data

All data that we capture will be stored on secure servers located within Canada, with only information necessary for the research study being collected. All information obtained will be kept strictly confidential, within the limits of the law. To preserve the confidentiality of the data, a code number known only to those directly involved with this research project will be assigned to each participant, and any personally identifiable information will be stored in a secured computer file.

Consensus meeting

This step will aim to detail the final items to be included in the priority list.

Participants

Participants will be invited from the eDelphi phase and selected purposively by the research team to include individuals with a variety of backgrounds (eg, country, academic level, research context), and that had selected the box showing their interest in participating in the consensus meeting. Approximately 25 people will be invited to an online meeting, a size that balances diversity of opinion with meaningful opportunities for interaction,³¹ and maximises the ability to achieve consensus.

The individuals selected will be contacted by email, with a link that provides access to the information and consent form of the consensus meeting. After accepting, participants will access the Zoom platform with an invitation link sent by email.

The meeting will be recorded to aid with the generation of the final report. Zoom's inbuilt anonymous voting system will be used for people to be able to vote on the inclusion or exclusion of items.

Meeting structure

Established nominal group technique methods will guide the consensus meeting.^{26 32} The summary of the results of the previous work will be provided in advance to ground conversations on empirical information and to facilitate cohesive discussion during the meeting.²⁷ The meeting will start with formal presentations. Using a triangulation approach,^{33 34} we will then lead a structured discussion of each proposed item.³⁵ An experienced, independent facilitator will conduct the discussions.²⁷ Participants will discuss and vote (using anonymous e-ballots), with the potential for a re-vote if needed,²⁸ with only items supported by at least 75% of participants being adopted.²⁷

Anticipated output

The consensus meeting will generate a summary document detailing the questions that will generate the final priority list. This list draft will be circulated to the consensus group participants who will be asked to check if the document accurately represents the discussions and decisions made during the meeting.³⁵ Then, we will distribute a final version of the document to all eDelphi participants to seek feedback on its wording and content and to assess whether the consensus meeting accurately captured their opinions.²⁷

Data analysis

The research team will analyse the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants using raw numbers, means and percentages. For each round of data collection, the frequency of participant ratings for each item will be used to determine the percentage of low, medium or high for each item. For the ranking question, each ranking position will receive a score with the highest position receiving the lowest score. The average score of each item will be calculated by dividing the sum of scores attributed to that item by the number of participants that ranked it. An ascending order will be presented, with the first item, considered the most important one, that is, the one with the lowest score. Data on average rank and the number of individuals providing data will be included in summary tables.

Team members

The project will be organised and developed by two main groups: the CSC and the Coordinating Research Team. The full list of members is available on the website (<https://mbmc-cmc.ca/projects/edelphi/>). The CSC will be responsible for: the review and editing of the initial list of methodological items; providing feedback on the survey structure and project plan; providing feedback on the results of each survey round (agreeing on the items that participants may suggest, dropping of items, etc); and helping to share the eDelphi with their networks. The research team, the Montreal Behavioural Medicine Centre, will be responsible for: creating and delivering on the project timelines; creating project documents; setting up and organising the surveys.

Patient and public involvement

Given the emphasis on the methodological aspects of the RR process, with researchers being the primary target end-user of this work, we decided to not include patients in the CSC. The eDelphi does include interested parties, for example, guideline and policy developers, end-users (public and patients), journal editors, from whom we will draw on for the final consensus meeting, to ensure that the final document will have direct input from all related groups. In addition, we will leverage interested parties in the creation of a variety of knowledge translation products, for example, lay summaries, public-facing presentations, infographics, etc.

Expected outcomes and limitations

The Delphi process is a well-established consensus-building process that will provide us with a good picture of the priority questions that need to be answered regarding the methodological conduct of RRs. The present study will generate a list of specific and focused questions, which can be used to prioritise research questions and to design future methodological studies that will answer those questions. These will ultimately create an evidence base for evidence synthesis researchers when deciding the best approaches to perform a RR.

While this research represents an important initial stage towards refining the conduct of RRs in a more time-efficient way, it will not provide definitive answers on the conduct of RRs. In addition, the response rates and representation of different profiles, perspectives and experiences of participant's cannot be guaranteed. However, the breadth and diversity of the recruitment strategy will likely help mitigate this issue. Finally, the terminology used might be interpreted differently across individuals from different domains and backgrounds. To try and mitigate against this an extensive list of definitions will be used and we will emphasise that items need to be evaluated based on the concept, rather than on the wording.

ETHICS AND DISSEMINATION

This study was approved by the Concordia University Human Research Ethics Committee under the Certification Number 30015 229.

The dissemination plan includes both traditional academic knowledge products, for example, presentations and scientific meetings and publication in peer-reviewed journals, as well as other knowledge dissemination products, for example, lay summaries, public-facing presentations and infographics. We will also leverage social media, via the members of the CSC and related organisations, to disseminate results and information as broadly as possible. We will specifically target potential funders, as these will be the bodies that will be targeted for the future methodological studies that will be needed to address the final priority list.

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Funding This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors. AMV is supported by Fonds de recherche du Québec: Santé (FRQS) doctoral scholarship. ACT is supported by a Tier 2 Canada Research Chair in Knowledge Synthesis. SO is supported by a Research Grant to institution, The International Development Research Centre has funded Prof Sandy Oliver for her PEERSS partnership work (<https://peerss.org/>), in the context of which she contributed to this paper. JNL is support by the Tier 1 Canada Research Chair in Evidence-Support Systems. TK holds a leadership or fiduciary role in the WHO EVIPNet Steering Group. LL holds a leadership or fiduciary role in the South Africa Centre for Evidence, an NGO funded by external grants to support the use of evidence by policy-makers. SLB is supported by the CIHR-SPOR initiative through the Mentoring Chair programme (SMC-151518) and by the FRQS through the Chaire de recherche double en Intelligence Artificielle/Santé Numérique ET sciences de la vie programme (309811).

Competing interests The authors alone are responsible for the views expressed in this paper and they do not necessarily represent the views, decisions or policies of the institutions with which they are affiliated. The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Patient and public involvement Patients and/or the public were not involved in the design, or conduct, or reporting, or dissemination plans of this research.

Patient consent for publication Consent obtained directly from patient(s)

Provenance and peer review Not commissioned; externally peer reviewed.

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SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Identifying priority questions regarding rapid systematic reviews' methods: protocol for an eDelphi study

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Ethics Certification**CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY
FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS**

Name of Applicant: Dr. Simon Bacon

Department: Faculty of Arts and Science\Health, Kinesiology and Applied Physiology

Agency: Canadian Diabetes Association
Canadian Institutes of Health Research

Title of Project: Identifying priority questions regarding rapid reviews methodology: an eDelphi study

Certification Number: 30015229

Valid From: May 02, 2022 To: May 01, 2023

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard DeMont".

Dr. Richard DeMont, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee



Information and Consent Form – eDelphi Process

Study Title: Identifying priority questions regarding rapid reviews methodology: an eDelphi process

Researcher: Simon Bacon

Researcher's Contact Information: Simon L. Bacon, Ph.D.; Professor, Department of Health, Kinesiology, and Applied Physiology, Concordia University, and Researcher, Research Centre, CIUSSS du Nord-de-l'Île-de-Montréal (simon.bacon@concordia.ca; 514-338-2222 ext. 3709).

Source of funding for the study: CIHR-SPOR Chair in Innovative Patient-Oriented, Behavioural Clinical Trials

You are being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of the study is to survey a group of rapid reviews experts, using a modified eDelphi process, in order to identify the priority research questions and gaps about the conduct of rapid reviews.

Rapid reviews are being explored as an evidence synthesis method that it is resource-limited and that allows the production of a reliable summary, especially when decision-making is urgent. However, the methods to build this reliable evidence synthesis are not clear and there are many questions regarding the methods' required steps. The eDelphi process is a well-established consensus-building method that allows the construction of a consensus towards a specific question. This process will be done exclusively online, and will include several survey rounds during which participants will review selected items and rank their priority order.

It is anticipated that at the end of the process, a 10-item priority list will be generated, with the **most relevant questions that need to be answered regarding the methods of rapid reviews.**

B. PROCEDURES

Approximately 30-50 rapid reviews experts will participate in the eDelphi process.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to answer some general questions about yourself (e.g., experience with evidence synthesis, job title, country).

You will then be asked to participate in three rounds of online surveys, using the LimeSurvey platform that you will access through an email with a personalised link.

Round 1

You will use three options of categories to rate the importance of suggested methodological questions of rapid reviews (high, medium, and low). For the items rated as very important, you will be asked to rank them in order of priority (1=highest priority, 2=2nd highest, etc.). Specific questions with open format responses will allow for modifications to the wording of items, as well as suggestions of additional items.

Round 2

Items will be rephrased according to the responses from Round 1. You will be provided with the median and inter-quartile range of rankings and you will re-rate the perceived importance of each item. You will also be asked whether you agree with items excluded from Round 1 or if any essential items are still missing.

Round 3

You will re-rate the remaining items. After this round, we will generate a final list of items for discussion at the consensus meeting (those items believed important by $\geq 33\%$ of participants).

In total, participating in this study will take around 20 minutes each round.

After the eDelphi phase, some participants will be selected purposively by the investigative team (to include individuals with a variety of backgrounds, e.g., country, academic level, research context), with equal representation of men and women. Approximately 25 people will be invited to a consensus meeting.

The consensus meeting will also happen online and will follow established nominal group technique methods. The summary of the results of the previous work will be provided in advance, to ground conversations on empirical information and to facilitate cohesive discussion during the meeting. The meeting will start with presentations and a discussion and vote process will happen to discuss each item of the priority question list. The consensus meeting will generate a summary document detailing the questions that will generate the final priority list. Drafts will be circulated to consensus group

participants to check that the document accurately represents the discussions had and decisions made during the meeting. We will then distribute a final version of the document to all eDelphi participants to seek feedback on its wording and content, and to assess whether the consensus meeting accurately captured their opinions.

You can choose to participate in the Consensus Meeting or not. In case you don't want to participate, you can still be part of the eDelphi process.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

There are no risks associated with your participation to this study. The only possible drawback or disadvantage is the time required to complete the survey, which should take around 20 minutes, per round, for a total of around 60 minutes.

This research is not intended to benefit you personally. The primary advantage associated with taking part in this study is to have the opportunity to express your own concerns and questions regarding the development of rapid reviews and to contribute to creating a priority list of methodological questions and issues relevant to rapid reviews. At the end, you will have access to the results and will be able to see what has been identified as missing in the field of rapid reviews research methods.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

Survey data will be collected on LimeSurvey, which is hosted by Concordia University on secure servers located within Canada. Only information necessary for the research study will be collected. Participants will access the LimeSurvey platform with a personalised link sent by email.

All information obtained will be kept strictly confidential, within the limits of the law. To preserve your identity and the confidentiality of your data, you will be identified with a code number known only to those directly involved with this research project. Only this code number will be used during analysis.

All data captured through LimeSurvey will be transferred and stored on secure servers located at the CIUSSS-NIM, under the responsibility of Dr. Simon Bacon. Personal data about participants, such as basic demographic information, will be kept in a separate database on secure servers also hosted by the CIUSSS-NIM.

We will not allow anyone to access the information, except people directly involved in conducting the research. We will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

The final study results may be printed in medical journals or shared with other people at scientific meetings, but it will be impossible to identify you. Participants of the last phase of the study, that includes the consensus meeting, may inform the research team in case they want to participate in the publication process.

All data will be stored for a period of 10 years.

F. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is purely your decision. If you do participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason, without having to justify your decision.

You can also ask that the information you provided not be used, and your choice will be respected. If you decide that you don't want us to use your information, you must tell the research team within one (1) week (7 days). If data collection has finished and analyses are completed (this may be true for the various phases of the online survey) then we would not be able to exclude data.

No compensation will be offered to participants.

There are no negative consequences for not participating, stopping in the middle, or asking us not to use your information.

G. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions by email and any questions have been answered. I agree to participate in the eDelphi phase of this research under the conditions described.

Please let us know if you are interested in being invited to attend the consensus meeting:

Yes, I am interested in attending the consensus meeting. Not all participants will be invited. I understand that I am free to refuse to attend if I am invited.

No, I do not want to be invited to attend the consensus meeting. I am interested in participating only in the eDelphi phase of the study.

NAME (please print)

DATE _____

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the following members of the research team:

Ariany Marques Vieira, PhD Student, Department of Health, Kinesiology, and Applied Physiology, Concordia University. Montreal Behavioural Medicine Centre, CIUSSS du Nord-de-l'Île-de-Montréal
(ariany.marquesvieira@concordia.mail.ca).

Geneviève Szczepanik, Research Coordinator, Montreal Behavioural Medicine Centre, CIUSSS du Nord-de-l'Île-de-Montréal
(genevieve.szczepanik@mbmc-cmcm.ca; (514) 358-6214)

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or oor.ethics@concordia.ca.



Information and Consent Form – Consensus Meeting

Study Title: Identifying priority questions regarding rapid reviews methodology: an eDelphi process

Researcher: Simon Bacon

Researcher's Contact Information: Simon L. Bacon, Ph.D.; Professor, Department of Health, Kinesiology, and Applied Physiology, Concordia University, and Researcher, Research Centre, CIUSSS du Nord-de-l'Île-de-Montréal (simon.bacon@concordia.ca; 514-338-2222 ext. 3709).

Source of funding for the study: CIHR-SPOR Chair in Innovative Patient-Oriented, Behavioural Clinical Trials

You are being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of the study is to survey a group of rapid reviews experts, using a modified eDelphi process, in order to identify the priority research questions and gaps about the conduct of rapid reviews.

Rapid reviews are being explored as an evidence synthesis method that is resource-limited and that allows the production of a reliable summary, especially when decision-making is urgent. However, the methods to build this reliable evidence synthesis are not clear and there are many questions regarding the methods' required steps. The eDelphi process is a well-established consensus-building method that allows the construction of a consensus towards a specific question. This process will be done exclusively online, and will include several survey rounds during which participants will review selected items and rank their priority order.

It is anticipated that at the end of the process, a 10-item priority list will be generated, with the **most relevant questions that need to be answered regarding the methods of rapid reviews.**

B. PROCEDURES

Approximately 30-50 rapid reviews experts will participate in the eDelphi process.

If you agreed to participate in the three eDelphi rounds, you were asked to answer some general questions about yourself (e.g., experience with evidence synthesis, job title, country), which we may use in the consensus meeting analysis and report.

After the three eDelphi rounds of online surveys, some participants will be selected purposively by the investigative team (to include individuals with a variety of backgrounds, e.g., country, academic level, research context), with equal representation of men and women. Approximately 25 people will be invited to a consensus meeting.

The consensus meeting will also happen online and will follow established nominal group technique methods. The summary of the results of the previous work will be provided in advance, to ground conversations on empirical information and to facilitate cohesive discussion during the meeting. The meeting will start with presentations and a discussion and vote process will happen to discuss each item of the priority question list. The consensus meeting will generate a summary document detailing the questions that will generate the final priority list. Drafts will be circulated to consensus group participants to check that the document accurately represents the discussions had and decisions made during the meeting. We will then distribute a final version of the document to all eDelphi participants to seek feedback on its wording and content, and to assess whether the consensus meeting accurately captured their opinions.

For the voting process and general data collection, a member of the research group will work as a minute taker. The meeting will happen using Zoom as the online meeting platform and will be recorded. The Montreal Behavioural Medicine Centre has a license to Zoom which guarantees security and privacy. AES 256-bit encryption safeguards all log-in.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

There are no risks associated with your participation to this study. The only possible drawback or disadvantage is the time required to participate in the meeting and to review the documents provided, which should take around in total 200 minutes.

This research is not intended to benefit you personally. The primary advantage associated with taking part in this study is to have the opportunity to express your own concerns and questions regarding the development of rapid reviews and to contribute to creating a priority list of methodological questions and issues relevant to rapid reviews. At the end, you will have

access to the results and will be able to see what has been identified as missing in the field of rapid reviews research methods.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

The meeting will happen using Zoom platform. Data will be collected by the minute taker and meeting recording. The Zoom line is hosted by the Montreal Behavioural Medicine Centre. Only information necessary for the research study will be collected. Participants will access the Zoom platform with an invitation link sent by email.

All information obtained will be kept strictly confidential, within the limits of the law. To preserve your identity and the confidentiality of your data, you will not be identified and only a code number known only to those directly involved with this research project. Only this code number will be used during analysis.

On a scientific publication or any report of the consensus meeting, a list of the attendees can be shared. This usually is done to allow transparency and a better interpretation of the results by including names, affiliation or position and credentials of the consensus expert panel members. If the research team decides to publish the list of the attendees, only this information will be shared, and not individual contributions or specific answers linked to each participant.

Participants need to respect each other's confidentiality and not reveal anyone's opinion, position, or share any information outside of the meeting.

The meeting recording captured through Zoom will be transferred and stored on secure servers located at the CIUSSS-NIM, under the responsibility of Dr. Simon Bacon. Personal data about participants, such as basic demographic information collected in the survey phase of the project, will be kept in a separate database on secure servers also hosted by the CIUSSS-NIM.

We will not allow anyone to access the information, except people directly involved in conducting the research. We will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

The final study results may be printed in medical journals or shared with other people at scientific meetings. Participants of the last phase of the study, that includes the consensus meeting, may inform the research team in case they want to participate in the publication process.

All data will be stored for a period of 10 years.

F. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is purely your decision.

In case you sign the Information and Consent Form agreeing to participate in the consensus meeting, you can change your mind and cancel your participation in the meeting up to five days before the meeting date. If you do participate in this phase of the study (consensus meeting), you will not be able to completely withdraw from the study. Participants may withdraw and the direct quotes from them can be excluded, but because each participant's answers can influence other participants' answers, it is impossible to completely remove the data.

If you decide that you don't want us to use your information, you must tell the research team as soon as possible, up to one week after the consensus meeting. After that, if data collection has finished, and the summary document detailing the questions that will generate the final priority list meeting is already done, then we would not be able to exclude data.

In case you sign the Information and Consent Form agreeing to participate in the consensus meeting, you can change your mind and cancel your participation in the meeting up to five days before the meeting date.

No compensation will be offered to participants.

There are no negative consequences for not participating, stopping in the middle, or asking us not to use your information.

G. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions by email and any questions have been answered. I agree to participate in the consensus meeting phase of this research under the conditions described.

NAME (please print)

DATE _____

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the following members of the research team:

Ariany Marques Vieira, PhD Student, Department of Health, Kinesiology, and Applied Physiology, Concordia University. Montreal Behavioural Medicine Centre, CIUSSS du Nord-de-l'Île-de-Montréal (ariany.marquesvieira@concordia.mail.ca).

Geneviève Szczepanik, Research Coordinator, Montreal Behavioural
Medicine Centre, CIUSSS du Nord-de-l'Île-de-Montréal
(genevieve.szczepanik@mbmc-cmcm.ca; (514) 358-6214)

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the
Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or
oor.ethics@concordia.ca.

Eligibility Questions

1. Please, select the category with which you most strongly identify.

Researcher (including research-focus students)

Healthcare practitioner (including trainees)

Policymaker

Patient / community member / caregiver

2. How many years of experience do you have with evidence syntheses*?

** Evidence syntheses are studies developed to gather available evidence to answer a specific question. This includes systematic reviews, scoping reviews, and rapid reviews.*

None

Less or equal 4 years

5-6 years

7-8 years

9-10 years

11-12 years

13-14 years

15 years or more

3. In what aspects of evidence synthesis have you previously participated in (tick all that apply)?

Conceptualization/Research question development

Undertaking literature searches

Study screening and selection

Data extraction

Quality appraisal

Data synthesis

Interpretation of results

Knowledge translation

Other

4. How would you rate your own knowledge about conducting evidence syntheses (e.g., systematic reviews, rapid reviews, meta-analyses)? Use a scale from 0 = no expertise to 10 = very strong expertise.

5. What is the approximate number of rapid reviews* that you have previously participated in?

** Rapid Reviews accelerate the process of conducting a traditional systematic review through streamlining or omitting a variety of methods to produce evidence in a resource-efficient manner. It is a systematic way of summarizing the literature in a more resource-efficient way, usually taking less than 12 weeks to be finalized.*

0

1 or 2

3 or 4

5 or 6

7 or more

Sociodemographic Information Questions

This project aims to include responses from a wide range of people, including people with a variety of backgrounds considered experts in evidence-synthesis. For that, we would like to ask you for some general information about you. Your answers will be confidential, and no individual will be identified when the results are presented. Your contact is requested to send you the next rounds of the survey. This project aims to include responses from a wide range of people, including people with a variety of backgrounds providing valuable expertise in evidence-synthesis. To this end, we would like to ask questions about your personal background. Your answers will be confidential, and no individual will be identified when the results are presented. Your contact information is only requested to send you the next rounds of the survey.

1. In which age group do you better fit?

66 years or more

56-65 years

46-55 years

36-45 years

26-35 years

18-25 years

Less than 18 years

Prefer not to answer

2. With which sex do you most strongly identify?

Female

Male

Prefer not to answer

Other

3. What is your job title?

This information will help to understand the profile of the participants. You can write in a few words your current position. For example, Graduate student, Research Assistant, Managing director.

4. In which country do you currently work?

This question will help to understand the demographics of the participants. You can write the name of the country where you hold a position. For example: Canada, Australia, Nigeria.

5. In which city do you currently work?

6. In what field/area or research do you predominantly perform your evidence syntheses (please select all that apply)?

Evidence syntheses are studies developed to gather evidence available to answer a specific question. This includes systematic reviews, scoping reviews, and rapid reviews, for example.

Clinical

Public Health

Health system

Prefer not to answer

Other

7. What is your role in evidence synthesis (lead reviewer, coordinator, field expert, contributor to study selection and data extraction, responsible for results interpretation,...) ?

Evidence syntheses are studies developed to gather evidence available to answer a specific question. This includes systematic reviews, scoping reviews, and rapid reviews, for example.

Glossary of terms/List of definitions

Data analysis is the process of taking data and turning it into a useful material to answer a research question. There are different methods, such as qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Data abstraction/extraction is related to the act of separating, withdrawing, and taking data of interest from included studies or different sources. Usually, information about study characteristics, descriptive data, and findings (outcome data) are part of data extraction (Munn *et al.*, 2014).

Efficiency is the ability to perform something well, successfully, and without waste (e.g. time, money). Balance between quality and resource consumption.

Evidence synthesis is a type of study developed to gather available evidence to answer a specific question. This includes SRs, scoping reviews, living reviews, overview of reviews and RRs for example.

Grey literature is materials and research produced outside of the traditional commercial or academic publishing and distribution channels. Common grey literature publication types include pre-prints, reports, working papers, government documents, white papers and evaluation (Simon Fraser Library, accessed in 2022).

Methods: Research methods are particular processes for collecting and analyzing data. For evidence syntheses, it usually covers the methods for: acquisition of evidence (search strategy, inclusion criteria, selection process), data extraction, data analysis, data appraisal/risk of bias/quality assessment strategy, and data synthesis process.

Rapid systematic reviews (RRs) are another evidence synthesis method that accelerates the process of conducting a traditional systematic review through streamlining or omitting a variety of methods to produce evidence in a resource-efficient manner (Hamel *et al.*, 2021). The kinds of methods that this study will include are: search strategy, studies selection (level one and two of the screening), data extraction, risk of bias appraisal and data analysis. It is also referred in this project as **Rapid Reviews**.

Report: “A document (paper or electronic) supplying information about a particular study. It could be a journal article, preprint, conference abstract, study register entry, clinical study report, dissertation, unpublished manuscript, government report, or any other document providing relevant information” (Page *et al.*, 2021).

Risk of bias appraisal/assessment: “The purpose of study quality assessment is to capture and analyze variations among the included studies—those that met initial inclusion criteria— in terms of their credibility and vulnerability to various sources of bias” (Littell *et al.*, 2008, Chapter 4).

Screening is part of the studies selection process for a review, checking if the references fit or not the inclusion criteria. It includes different levels, such as Title and Abstract and Full text screening.

Search Strategy, in the context of evidence syntheses, is the structured plan of how to find studies of interest. The search strategy includes the terms that are going to be used and also the sources that will be consulted (e.g. databases, repositories).

Stakeholder: the parties who will engage in, benefit from or be affected by the procedure (Tricco AC, *et al.* WHO Practical Guide, 2017). For this study, stakeholders of a rapid review process include decision-makers, guideline

and policy developers, healthcare providers, health system managers, end-users (public and patients), and journal editors.

Synthesis: In the context of evidence syntheses, the synthesis is the summarization of the data that were collected. “*In systematic reviews of quantitative (numerical) data, data synthesis usually appears as a meta-analysis, a statistical method that combines the results of a number of studies to calculate a single summary effect*” (Munn *et al.*, 2014).

Systematic reviews (SRs) are the most common type of evidence synthesis. It is a way of searching, selecting, appraising, and synthesising the available evidence to answer a research question. It organises all empirical evidence that fits in pre-specified eligibility criteria and aim to reduce bias (Higgins *et al.*, 2022).

References

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<https://www.lib.sfu.ca/help/research-assistance/format-type/grey-literature>

Tricco AC, Langlois EV, Straus SE, editors. Rapid reviews to strengthen health policy and systems: a practical guide. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2017. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.