

Locating evidence for developing countries: a case study of three health promotion reviews

Claire Stansfield and Kelly Dickson

EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, London, WC1H 0NR. Contact: c.stansfield@ioe.ac.uk. Website: <http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk>

Background

- Research literature in the fields of health promotion and international development lies across several disciplines, and can be challenging to find.
- Analysing how studies used for systematic reviews are identified informs search strategies in future reviews.
- A programme of reviews commissioned by the UK Department for International Development in 2010 offered an opportunity to evaluate search strategies from three reviews in public health. Each of these:
 - researched interventions towards girls and women in developing countries.
 - contained controlled trials and studies using other designs.
 - used search strategies across bibliographic databases in fields of health and social science, specialist registers, websites, key contacts, and reference checking.

Objectives

- To assess the utility of different search sources for identifying research for three rapid systematic reviews that concern public health interventions for women in developing countries.

Which search sources are useful in identifying research?

Are there other findings of relevance to literature searches for these countries?

Methods

- A retrospective analysis was undertaken of the search source locations of the studies that were included in the three reviews^{1,2,3}.
- Review management software (EPPI-Reviewer 4) was used to determine how each study had been identified from the research literature, including those found in multiple locations.
- Comparisons were made for the search sources across the three reviews.

Results

A. Review on the impact of post-abortion care family planning counselling and services in low-income countries¹

Table 1 Where the 15 included studies were found

	Journal articles	Other reports	Total	Notes
Popline	7	2 (2)	9 (2)	Overlap of Popline and Pubmed of 7 journal articles
Pubmed	9 (1)		9 (1)	
Websites	-	3 (3)	3(3)	
Sociological abstracts	1	-	1	Also in Pubmed
Reference lists	1 (1)	-	1 (1)	The journal, Reproductive Health Matters is indexed in Pubmed from a later date to this paper

- Focused search terms
- 15 studies set in 9 countries
- 1 controlled trial was considered of medium quality, found via Pubmed and Popline
- 3% (3/119) potentially relevant items unobtainable on full text

Notes: Data includes items found in more than one location. Items in brackets were only found in that source

C. Impact of separate toilet provision for girls at schools on enrolment, attendance and completion³

- No studies were identified to answer the review's key questions.
- As well as a paucity of available data, there were difficulties in sourcing data.
- Out of 485 items identified as potentially relevant from screening on title and abstract, 16% (n=79) were unable to be sourced through library loans (6%) or the actual citation (10%)

12 studies were used to inform the review's supplementary questions:

- 4 of these were from databases (including Adolec, Global Health, Pubmed, Social Science Citation Index)
- 8 items from organisational websites and reference checking, key contacts

B. Providing girls and young women access to economic assets in low-income and fragile states²

Table 2 Where the 18 included studies were found

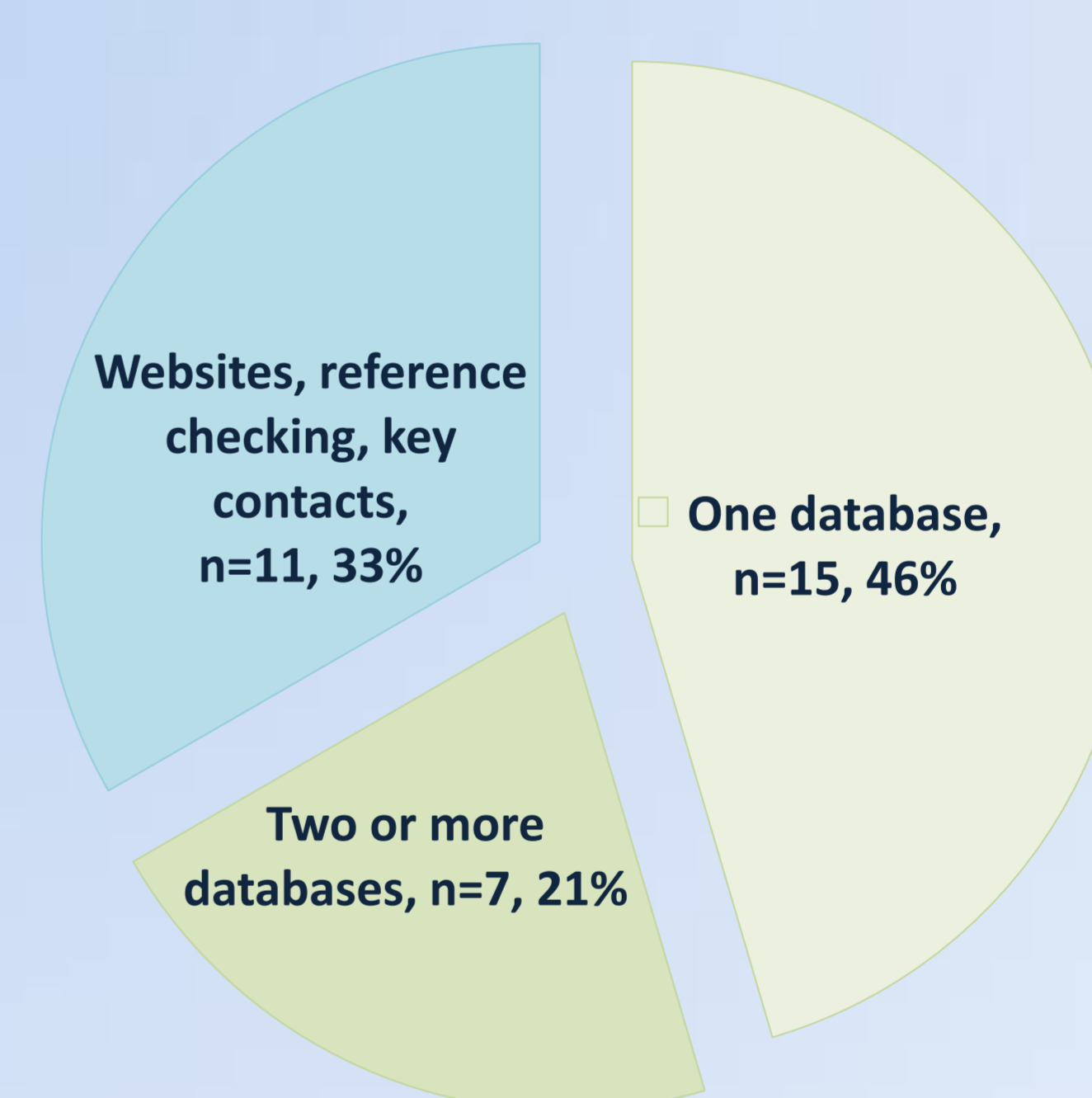
	Journal articles	Other reports	Total	Focus of paper: social, education or health
Websites and contacts	1 (1)	5 (5)	6 (6)	Social, n=4 Education, n=2 Health, n=2
Econlit	2 (1)	3 (2)	5 (3)	Education, n=5 All 3 areas, n=1
Pubmed	4 (3)		4 (3)	Health, n=4; Social, n=2
ERIC	1 (1)		1 (1)	Education Social
Reference checking		1 (1)	1(1)	Education
TROPHI	1 (1)		1 (1)	All 3 areas
Cochrane Library	1		1	Health
IBSS	1		1	Education
Sociological abstracts	1		1	Education

- Broad range of search terms.
- Websites, key contacts, referencing checking, and TROPHI identified research not targeted from broad search terms
- 18 studies set in 12 countries
- 14 studies of high and medium quality, of which 7 journal articles and 7 reports
- 8 studies used controlled study designs (4 from databases, 4 from websites and contacts)
- Research with social focus tended to be published as reports; and within health as journal articles
- 6% (10/179) of potentially relevant items unobtainable on full text

Notes: Data includes items found in more than one location. Items in brackets were only found in that source

Overall: How the research was found for two reviews (A and B), N=33

Figure 1



Discussion

- Data are shown only for search sources that provided research in reviews. In all cases, more databases were searched. Review B has a wider scope than public health.
- The overall trend of where the literature was identified, in Figure 1, is similar for each review individually, demonstrating supplementary searches outside bibliographic databases are essential.
- The large portion of research only identified in one database illustrates the importance of database selection, and the need to utilise databases from a range of disciplinary fields.
- In reviews A and B although most of the relevant literature in the health fields was published as journal papers, although some was found within other reports.
- Review B shows that the publication type can sometimes vary across discipline areas. Equal numbers (n=4) controlled studies were published as journal articles or other reports.
- Limitations in sourcing full texts of the literature was found for all 3 reviews.

Conclusions

- New information resources for research in international development are emerging.
- Recommend further exploration of search sources that are more focussed on a topic area or geographical region.
- Recommend seeking items in the outside of journals, through contacts, websites, reference checking and specialised databases.
- There is a need for increased access to full text studies from these regions.

References

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