

A scoping review of rapid review methods

Summary

Our scoping review identified 100 reports describing the use, development, impact and evaluation of rapid reviews. Numerous rapid review approaches were identified, but few were used consistently in the literature. In addition, poor quality of reporting was observed when examining the specific steps used to conduct rapid reviews.

Implications

Health decision-makers (such as clinicians, patients, policy-makers) often need timely access to evidence. Although streamlining the systematic review process may produce timely results, the consequences of these methodological shortcuts should be investigated. We propose a prospective study comparing the results of rapid reviews to those obtained through systematic reviews on the same topic in order to examine the utility and potential risk

Reference: Tricco AC, Antony J, Zarin W, et al. A scoping review of rapid review methods. *BMC medicine*. 2015 Sep 16;13(1):1.

PMID: [26377409](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26377409/)

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What is the current situation?

- Rapid reviews are a form of knowledge synthesis in which components of the systematic review process are simplified or omitted to produce information in a timely manner.
- Although many centers around the world are conducting these reviews, few studies have examined the methodological characteristics of rapid reviews.

What is the objective?

We aimed to conduct a scoping review to examine articles, books, and reports that evaluated, compared, applied or described rapid review methods.

How was the review conducted?

- MEDLINE, EMBASE, the Cochrane Library, internet websites of rapid review producers, and reference lists were searched to identify studies for inclusion.
- Screening of the literature and data abstraction of relevant reports were conducted by two independent reviewers.
- Descriptive analysis was conducted.

What did the review find?

- After screening 3,397 titles and abstracts and 262 potentially relevant full-text articles, 100 articles plus one companion report were included.
- These papers applied a rapid review method (84), described its development (7) and impact (6), or compared a rapid review to a systematic review (4).
- Fifty unique rapid review methods were identified in the literature; 16 occurring more than once.
- The time taken to complete the rapid reviews was between 1 and 12 months; they were conducted, predominantly in Europe and North America.
- Many of the specific steps used to conduct a rapid review were not well reported, however, the following were the most commonly reported streamlined methods used to conduct rapid reviews:
 - ◇ Limited the literature search to published literature only (24%),
 - ◇ Limited inclusion criteria by date (68%) or language (49%),
 - ◇ One person screens and another verify or screen excluded studies (6%),
 - ◇ One person abstracts data and another verifies (23%),
 - ◇ Did not conduct risk of bias/quality appraisal (7%) or had only one reviewer conduct the quality appraisal (7%),
 - ◇ Presented results as a narrative summary (78%).
- Of the four case studies that compared the results of rapid reviews to systematic reviews, three found that the conclusions between rapid reviews and systematic reviews were congruent.

Funded by CIHR