

Mapping review could be seen as a subtype of scoping review and differentiating between the action of mapping evidence and presentation of evidence as maps may be helpful

Chen, Yen-Fu; Takwoingi, Yemisi; Grove, Amy

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Mapping review could be seen as a sub-type of scoping review, and differentiating between the action of mapping evidence and presentation of evidence as maps may be helpful

Manuscript type: Letter to the Editor

Authors

Yen-Fu Chen^{1*} E-mail: Y-F.Chen@warwick.ac.uk

Yemisi Takwoingi^{2, 3} E-mail: y.takwoingi@bham.ac.uk

Amy Grove¹ E-mail: a.l.grove@warwick.ac.uk

¹ Warwick Evidence, Division of Health Sciences, Warwick Medical School, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL, United Kingdom

² Test Evaluation Research Group, Institute of Applied Health Research, College of Medical and Dental Sciences, University of Birmingham, Birmingham B15 2TT, United Kingdom

³ NIHR Birmingham Biomedical Research Centre, University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust and University of Birmingham, Birmingham B15 2TH, United Kingdom

*Correspondence: Dr Yen-Fu Chen, tel: +44(0)24 765 24936, e-mail: Y-F.Chen@warwick.ac.uk

What is new?

- We propose that the term ‘scoping review’ be used in preference over ‘mapping review’, which could be seen as a sub-type of scoping review.
- It may be helpful to make a clear distinction between evidence mapping as the process of synthesis and evidence maps as the end tool for presenting findings.
- A new perspective focusing on the function and content of synthesis to differentiate between evidence synthesis products is presented graphically.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

We welcome the insightful commentary by Khalil and Tricco on similarities and differences between scoping reviews and mapping reviews [1]. Recognising plurality in methodological development and approaches to conducting evidence reviews with attendant diverse and potentially inconsistent terminology in evidence synthesis, we wish to provide additional thoughts to complement the discussions and trigger further debates.

First, methods to conduct scoping reviews have been better described and developed [2-5], when compared to those for mapping reviews, which generally lack a consistent conceptual and methodological framework. Khalil and Tricco clearly highlighted many shared features between scoping and mapping reviews [1], whereas the differences tend to be more arbitrary and less clear-cut. While we agree with the distinction that scoping reviews allow for more in-depth analysis of features of included studies than mapping reviews, this difference stems from the level of detail examined, not the inherent nature of the analysis. Considering the mature methodological guidance and wider adoption of the terminology for scoping reviews, the substantial overlap in scope, remits and methods, and the lack of fundamental differences between scoping reviews and mapping reviews, it may cause further confusion to consider mapping reviews as a separate 'type' of review.

Instead, we propose using the term scoping review preferentially. The term mapping review could be reserved for a sub-set of scoping reviews in which the focus is to map available evidence to a pre-defined framework with a lesser degree of inductive or deductive coding.

Second, mapping reviews and evidence and gap maps were described synonymously by Khalil and Tricco. We point readers to the seminal paper by Snilstveit et al. which describes the evidence and gap maps (EGMs) developed by the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) [6]. Here the authors depict EGMs as a tool that provides '*a visual display*' of a collection of evidence '*in a given sector or thematic area structured around a framework (matrix)*' [6]. For conceptual clarity, we should reserve the term evidence (and gap) maps to describe a *finalised tool* which is an end-product of the review (a static table or figure, or an interactive web application) [7]. The content of the tool (i.e., the evidence that has been mapped to a framework/matrix) can be obtained from scoping and mapping reviews (*evidence synthesis methods*), and thus making a distinction between the action of evidence mapping (the process) and the resultant evidence maps which organises review findings in a more accessible way (the output). We offer in Figure 1 a perspective to differentiate evidence synthesis products based on i) the key functions of the evidence synthesis activities and ii) the focus of contents of the resultant evidence synthesis products which we hope the evidence synthesis community find useful.

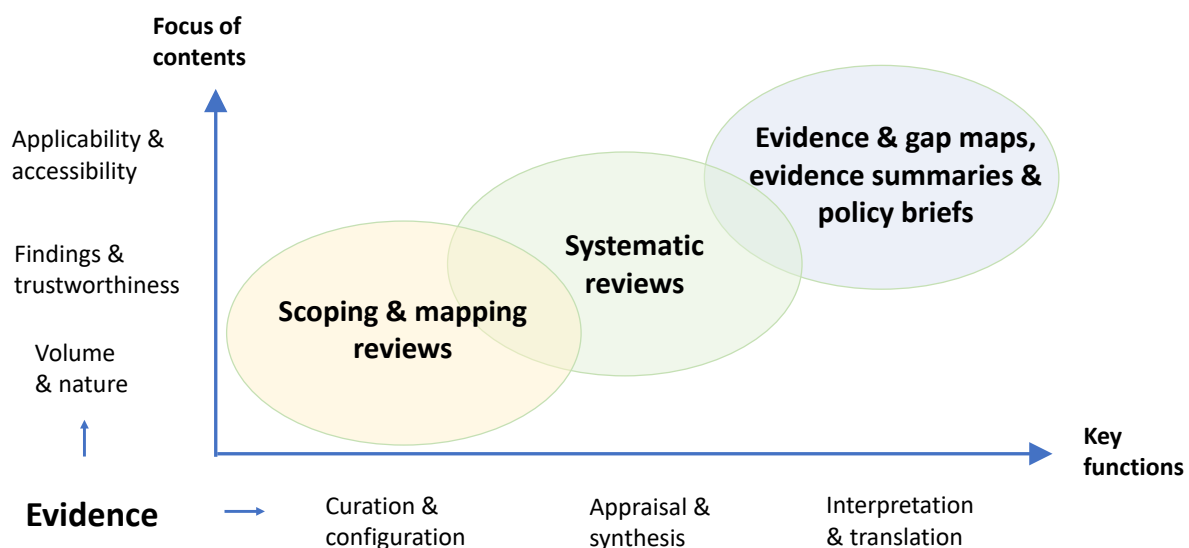


Figure 1. Differential emphasis on evidence synthesis functions and focus of contents between scoping & mapping reviews, systematic reviews, and evidence & gap maps and other evidence summaries.

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Declaration of interest: none.

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