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# What is qualitative evidence synthesis (QES)

The synthesis or amalgamation of individual qualitative research reports that relate to a specific topic or focus in order to arrive at new or enhanced understandings about the phenomenon under study/review.



# "The purpose of synthesising qualitative research

To integrate evidence from primary qualitative studies in order to develop **new cumulative knowledge** 

Not simply aggregating studies as has been more traditional in a narrative review of qualitative research





# QES

- How do people experience illness or challenging life circumstances?
- What are the barriers and facilitators to accessing healthcare?
- What impact do specific barriers and facilitators have on people, their experiences and behaviors?

Linked to a review of nursing interventions

- Why does an intervention work (or not), for whom and in what circumstances?
- How is an intervention experienced by all of those involved in developing, delivering or receiving it? What aspects of the intervention they value, or not; and why this is so?
- Which factors facilitate or hinder successful implementation of a program, service or treatment?
- How does a particular intervention needs to be adapted for large-scale roll-out (Roen 2006)?



# What constitutes quality end of life care? Patient adherence to tuberculosis treatment Adapting to and managing diabetes -seeking experiences and delay in canc

The experience of physical restraint

Development of a user-focused stroke service in primary care



# What might this have to offer?

Can identify outcomes that are not seen as important in a single qualitative study

More powerful explanation than is possible in a single qualitative study

Can refute or revise current understanding of a particular phenomenon eg leg ulceration, chronic not acute condition

# What might this have to offer?

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Can identify gaps in the evidence and reveal future research priorities

Complement findings of effectiveness reviews

Help inform complex interventions eg

intervention complexity

context and failure of implementation

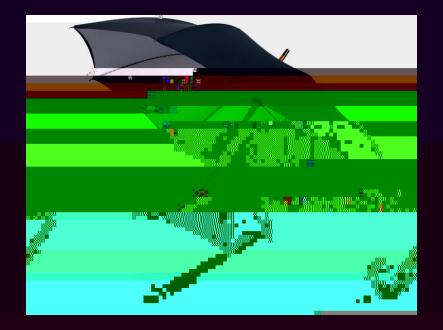
health systems issues

issues with fidelity, dose, reach, equity, process and outcomes

can all be explored with qualitative evidence to try and ascertain what happened in a positive, negative or neutral way

# Wethodologies for Qualitative Synthesis

Qualitative Systematic Reviews Qualitative Evidence Synthesis Qualitative Meta-Synthesis Qualitative Research Synthesis



Booth, Noyes, Flemming et al (2016) p16

# Methods for QES



Vary depend on the methodology chosen for the review Many are developed from methods associated with primary qualitative research eg

thematic analysis theme extraction constant comparative method coding

For more detail see: Booth, Noyes, Flemming et al (2016) p16

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# **Novice** Bewildering variety of methods of synthesis compounded by choice of checklists, conflicting guidance etc

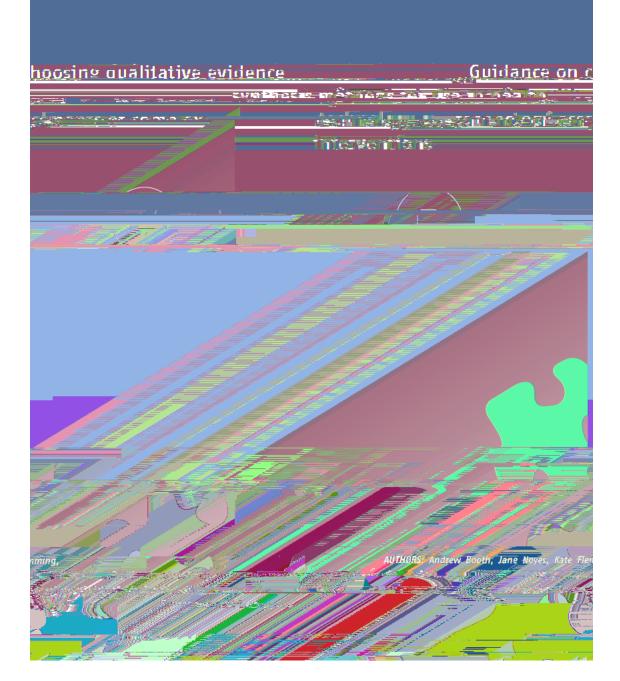
**Experienced** - Many authors stick to familiar methods rather than select most appropriate method to address question and type of evidence

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Guidance on choosing a method for qualitative evidence synthesis published in 2016

Available from: http://www.integratehta.eu/downloads/



# Choice of methods: Different approaches to QES



Three key methods recommended by CQIMG for undertaking a QES with the intention of integrating it with an effect review:

Thematic synthesis Framework synthesis/best fit framework synthesis Meta-ethnography





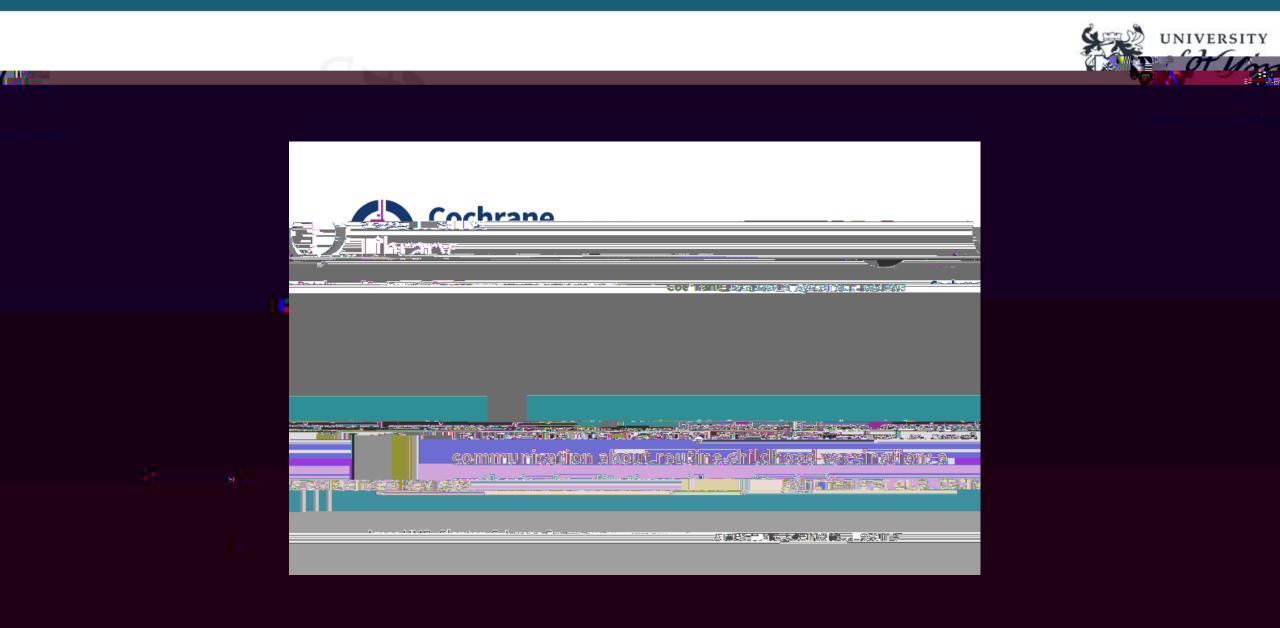
Thematic synthesis can develop either descriptive or analytic themes One of the most accessible forms of synthesis

-depth analytic themes can

be developed

Themes can then be integrated within an effectiveness review May be limited in interpretative power Can provide insight from qualitative to supplement the quantitative





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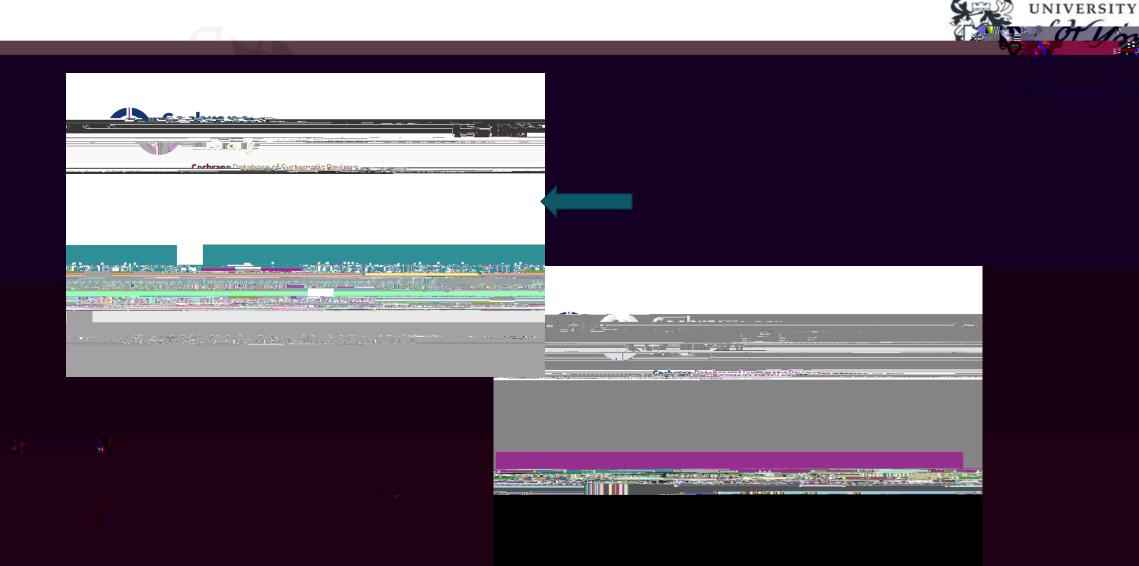
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# Framework synthesis and Best-fit framework synthesis

- A good choice of QES method due to the extent of the complexity the method can accommodate
- Frameworkallows a clear mechanism for integration of qualitative and quantitative evidence in an aggregative way
- Frameworks can derive from a pre-existing review, from a conceptual model, from a policy framework or from a logic model
- Requires identification and justification for the selection of the framework
- Risk of simplistically forcing data into a framework





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# Weta-ethnography

An explicitly interpretative approach to synthesis and aims to create new understandings and theories from a body of work

Leads to the creation of descriptive or high order constructs which can help understanding of the interventions within an effectiveness review, particularly where those interventions are complex

Takes time and experience and requires data within the primary studies to be



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