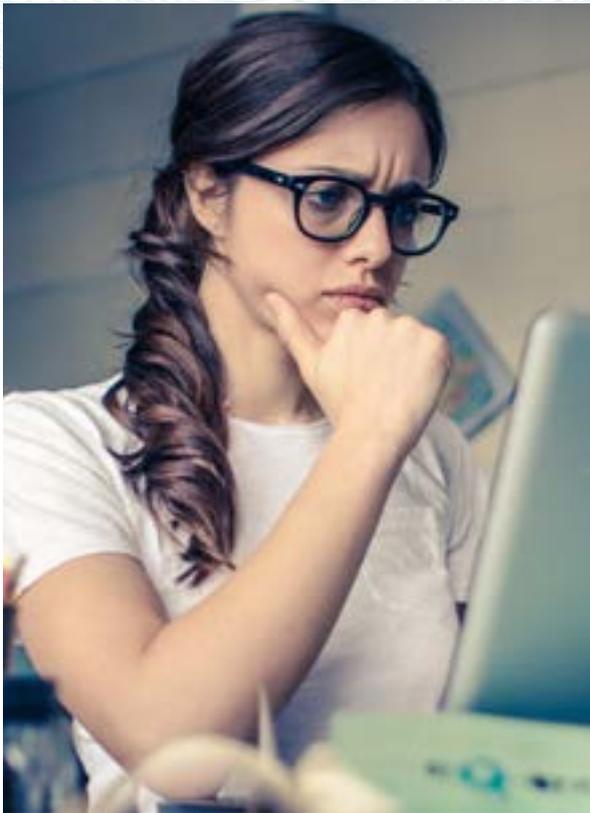


Policy briefs make systematic reviews easier to understand but little evidence of impact on use of study findings



Study participants felt that all evidence summary formats were easier to understand than full systematic reviews

What is the aim of this review?

This review summarizes the evidence from six randomized controlled trials that judged the effectiveness of systematic review summaries on policymakers' decision making, or the most effective ways to present evidence summaries to increase policymakers' use of the evidence.

It is likely that evidence summaries are easier to understand than complete systematic reviews. Whether these summaries increase the use of evidence from systematic reviews in policymaking is not clear.

What is this review about?

Systematic reviews are long and technical documents that may be hard for policymakers to use when making decisions. Evidence summaries are short documents that describe research findings in systematic reviews. These summaries may simplify the use of systematic reviews.

Other names for evidence reviews are policy briefs, evidence briefs, summaries of findings, or plain language summaries. The goal of this review was to learn whether evidence summaries help policymakers use evidence from systematic reviews. This review also aimed to identify the best ways to present the evidence summary to increase the use of evidence.

What are the main findings of this review?

This review included six randomized controlled studies. A randomized controlled study is one in which the participants are divided randomly (by chance) into separate groups to compare different treatments or other interventions. This method of dividing people into groups means that the groups will be similar and that the effects of the treatments they receive will be compared more fairly. At the time the study is done, it is not known which treatment is the better one.

The researchers who did these studies invited people from Europe, North America, South America, Africa, and Asia to take part in them. Two studies looked at "policy briefs," one study looked at an "evidence summary," two looked at a "summary of findings table," and one compared a "summary of findings table" to an evidence summary.



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How up-to-date is this review?

The authors of this review searched for studies through June 2016.

What is the Campbell Collaboration?

The Campbell Collaboration is an international, voluntary, non-profit research network that publishes systematic reviews. We summarise and evaluate the quality of evidence about programmes in the social and behavioural sciences. Our aim is to help people make better choices and better policy decisions.

About this summary

This summary was prepared by the authors of the Campbell Systematic Review 2018:8 “Do evidence summaries increase health policy-makers’ use of evidence from systematic reviews?” by Jennifer Petkovic, Vivian Welch, Marie Helena Jacob, Manosila Yoganathan, Ana Patricia Ayala, Heather Cunningham, Peter Tugwell (DOI 10.4073/csr.2018:8). Tanya Kristiansen (Campbell Collaboration) redesigned and edited the summary. Financial support from the American Institutes for Research for the production of this summary is gratefully acknowledged.

None of these studies looked at how policymakers directly used evidence from systematic reviews in their decision making, but two studies found that there was little to no difference in how they used the summaries. The studies relied on reports from decision makers. These studies included questions such as, “Is this summary easy to understand?”

There is very little evidence on the best way to present systematic review evidence to policymakers

Some of the studies looked at users’ knowledge, understanding, beliefs, or how credible (trustworthy) they believed the summaries to be. There was little to no difference in the studies that looked at these outcomes. Study participants rated the graded entry format higher for usability than the full systematic review. The graded entry format allows the reader to select how much information they want to read. The study participants felt that all evidence summary formats were easier to understand than full systematic reviews.

What do the findings of this review mean?

Our review suggests that evidence summaries help policymakers better understand the findings presented in systematic reviews. In short, evidence summaries should be developed to make it easier for policymakers to understand the evidence presented in systematic reviews. However, right now there is very little evidence on the best way to present systematic review evidence to policymakers.

