Scoping studies: towards a methodological framework

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This paper focuses on scoping studies, an approach to reviewing the literature which to date has received little attention in the research methods literature. We distinguish between different types of scoping studies and indicate where these stand in relation to full systematic reviews. We outline a framework for conducting a scoping study based on our recent experiences of reviewing the literature on services for carers for people with mental health problems. Where appropriate, our approach to scoping the field is contrasted with the procedures followed in systematic reviews. We emphasize how including a consultation exercise in this sort of study may enhance the results, making them more useful to policy makers, practitioners and service users. Finally, we consider the advantages and limitations of the approach and suggest that a wider debate is called for about the role of the scoping study in relation to other types of literature reviews.

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