

What is a research briefing?

Research briefings provide a concise summary of research knowledge on a particular topic. They summarise research evidence in an accessible form to a varied audience, including carers and service users, students, policy makers, social care workers, and service managers. Unlike a systematic review (such as a SCIE research review), a research briefing is not a definitive synthesis of all research knowledge on a topic. Instead it is intended as a useful introductory summary of the main findings in a field.

Who writes them?

Research briefings are written by authors who have expert knowledge in the topic area. This series of briefings is compiled by Keele University for SCIE. Each one is presented in a standard format and indicates the implications for different stakeholders such as policy makers, practitioners, managers, carers and service users.

Where does the research come from?

The information upon which the briefings are based is drawn from readily available sources that can be found in the libraries of most universities that provide social work education and training, or are freely available online. These include relevant electronic databases, journals and texts and, where appropriate, additional sources such as research commissioned by government departments, and other relevant research identified by the authors. Owing to funding constraints inter-library loans are not used in this briefing series. However, SCIE's systematic maps are used where applicable, for example the map on parental mental health problems and child welfare which can be viewed at <http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/webdatabases/Intro.aspx?ID=9>

The briefings seek to make use of the best available evidence, usually work that has been conducted in the UK in the last 5 or 10 years. Where this is limited then older studies, as well as research from other countries, may be used if the authors think the findings are relevant to a UK context.

How is the research selected?

When the title of the briefing has been decided, a research worker meets with the authors to identify the scope of the briefing, define relevant search terms and compile a list of relevant journals, databases, and websites. The research worker undertakes the searches and makes a full record of the search process (see Links). Inclusion criteria are also defined, to exclude irrelevant research and to allow further refined searching to take place. Authors are then provided with copies of all of the resulting research.

How is the research assessed?

The authors read all of the research and make an assessment of the merits of each study and the relevance of its findings to the briefing topic. This assessment is informed by the quality standards for research outlined in SCIE Knowledge Review 3 – Types and Quality of Knowledge in Social Care (see Links). In addition, authors assess the research using relevant questions drawn from the Keele/SCIE Critical Evaluation Framework for Social Care Research (see Links). This framework is used as a prompt to assist the authors' judgement of quality. For example, a study that employed an unreliable methodology or attempted to generalise from a limited sample would not generally merit inclusion. Research briefings do not record exactly how each of the source studies was rated for inclusion in the briefing, nor do they require that each item of the critical framework be applied systematically to every research source as would be the case in a systematic review. The studies that are selected for inclusion and reference are intended to be representative of the best available knowledge in the topic area. However, because of the short length of the briefings not all relevant studies are cited for each point made.

How is the final briefing produced?

Authors collate the key points from the research studies and combine them into a draft briefing document which goes through three stages of review. The first stage involves senior academics and researchers from the Steering Group at Keele who assess the content and may also request revisions to the briefing. The authors amend the draft accordingly. In the second stage of review, the revised draft is sent to the editorial board at Keele and to external advisors from organizations relevant to the topic, and once again the authors make any necessary amendments. In the third stage, the draft briefing is sent to SCIE who commission an independent review and also make suggestions and request revisions. When this process of review and revision is completed, the final version is published in hard copy and made available on the SCIE website at www.scie.org.uk.

Links

Link to map report

<http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/researchresources/index.asp>

Example of the 'Audit Record of Search'

<http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/briefings/files/rbsearch.pdf>

Knowledge Review 3 – Types and Quality of Knowledge in Social Care

<http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/knowledgereviews/kr03.asp>

Keel/SCIE Critical Evaluation Framework for Social Care Research

<http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/briefings/files/rbquality.pdf>