

Cochrane Consumers and Communication Review Group reviews

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How to consider equity issues

When planning a Cochrane review it can be important to consider issues of health equity, defined as ‘the absence of avoidable and unfair inequalities in health’ [1]. Reviews can consider equity in different ways, for example, by assessing the effects of interventions:

- directed at a particular disadvantaged population;
- aiming explicitly to reduce social gradients; or
- not aimed specifically to reduce inequity, but where the effects of the intervention on equity are important to understand.

For Cochrane Consumers and Communication Review Group (CC&CRG) reviews with a health equity focus, authors should refer to the Cochrane Equity Checklist (see <http://equity.cochrane.org/>). This presents a detailed process for planning and conducting such reviews, and includes advice on defining disadvantage, analysing and presenting data, and discussing the applicability of findings. Advice on transparent reporting of reviews with a health equity focus (PRISMA-Equity 2012) is also available on the Campbell and Cochrane Equity Methods group website and described in Welch *et al* 2012 [1].

Most CC&CRG reviews will not have a specific health equity focus, but authors should still consider equity issues when conducting the review. This is because considering only the average effects of interventions in systematic reviews, as an input to policy, may hide the effects of an intervention on health equity and may even increase health disparities in some cases.

Considering health equity may be therefore relevant at both protocol and review stages, particularly when planning the data extraction and analyses. Considering the PROGRESS-Plus categories can help authors to think through the different social categories whereby disadvantage may arise. PROGRESS- Plus stands for:

PROGRESS: Place of residence, Race/ethnicity, Occupation, Gender, Religion, Education, Socioeconomic Status, and Social Capital; and

Plus: Age, Disability and Sexual Orientation.

If the intervention under investigation is likely to have an effect on health equity, authors should consider planning to collect data on relevant categories from PROGRESS-Plus as part of their data extraction process. They might also consider the implications of different aspects of health equity for analyses and subgroups of studies, as well as within the review’s Discussion section, particularly in terms of applicability of the results.

Please consider the Cochrane Equity Checklist as well as supporting publications by the Campbell and Cochrane Equity Methods group, available at: <http://equity.cochrane.org/our-publications>

[1] Welch et al 2012 PRISMA-Equity 2012 extension: reporting guidelines for systematic reviews with a focus on health equity. PLOS Medicine 9(10): e1001333.