

Who's doing systematic reviews?: A descriptive analysis

Background/Objectives

While systematic reviews (SRs) were originally developed for medicine and its related fields, they seem to be increasingly published in other disciplines. We broadly describe the non-health sciences disciplines that are publishing systematic reviews.

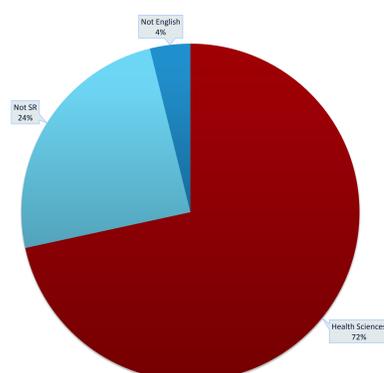
Methods

We searched Scopus™ for "systematic review*" in article title or abstract (>110K articles). Health science articles were filtered out using the Scopus™ subject categories. The resulting set of 2301 citations was screened for exclusion criteria. We categorized the final set of citations using the Scopus™ assigned All Science Journal Classification (ASJC) codes. Our filtered result set included 952 self-described systematic reviews outside the health science disciplines (Figure 2).

Exclusion Criteria

- Health sciences (broadly defined)
- Clearly not a systematic review
- Non-English language

Fig. 1 Exclusion Criteria
n=1348 articles excluded (First + second passes)



DISCUSSION

The vast majority of systematic reviews are still performed in the health sciences, though the method is clearly spreading to the social, physical and life sciences. Many self-described systematic reviews do not appear to be SRs as defined in the health sciences. Disciplines new to systematic reviews may use or adapt protocols developed for the health sciences to guide their research.

Fig. 2 Filtered Search - Subject Categories
n=1483 (952 articles)

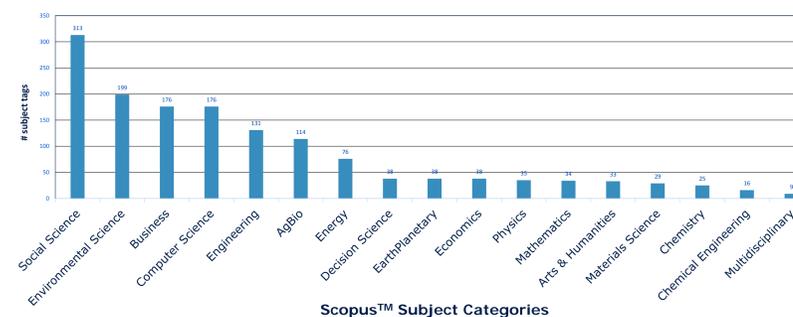
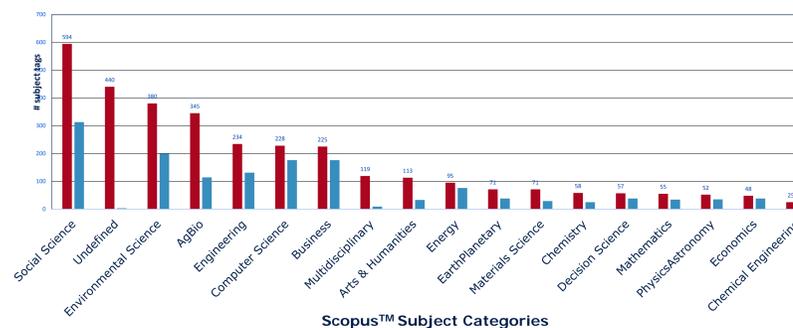


Fig. 3 Original & filtered - Subject Categories
n=3210 (2301 articles)



Our results show that the non-health science disciplines with the highest number of self described systematic reviews appear to be the social sciences, environmental science, business, computer science and engineering (Figure 3). In broader terms, the highest numbers are in the physical and social sciences (Figure 4).

REFERENCES

- Mongeon, P., & Paul-Hus, A. (2016). The journal coverage of Web of Science and Scopus: a comparative analysis. *Scientometrics*, 106(1), 213-228.
- Vinyard, M., & Whitt, J. (2016). Scopus. *The Charleston Advisor*, 18(2), 52-57.

Limitations

- Scopus indexes only a portion of the total research literature and may not be broadly representative.
- The term "systematic review" seems to be inconsistently defined across disciplines.
- Multidisciplinary research defies easy description and results in articles spanning numerous categories.
- A novel methodology was created and implemented for this project.

Next Steps/Questions

- How do individual non-health sciences disciplines define systematic reviews? Compare disciplinary SR definitions & protocols to those specified by Cochrane/Campbell/JBI, etc.
- Are discipline specific protocols being developed? What do they have in common with health science SR protocols, and how do they differ?
- How are systematic reviews in other disciplines evaluated for quality?
- What roles do librarians typically fill in non-health science SR projects?

Broad categories

Fig. 4 Filtered Scopus Subject Groups
n=1131 subject tags

