

Evaluating the overall strength of a body of evidence – Module 3

Categories of evidence	Quality + size + consistency + context	Typical features of the body of evidence	What it means for a proposed intervention
Very Strong	High quality body of evidence, large in size, consistent, and contextually relevant.	Research questions aimed at isolating cause and effect (i.e. what is happening) are answered using high quality experimental and quasi- experimental research designs , sufficient in number to have resulted in production of a systematic review or meta-analysis. Research questions aimed at exploring meaning (i.e. why and how something is happening) are considered through an array of structured qualitative observational research methods directly addressing contextual issues.	We are very confident that the intervention does or does not have the effect anticipated. The body of evidence is very diverse and highly credible, with the findings convincing and stable.
Strong	High quality body of evidence, large or medium in size, highly or moderately consistent, and contextually relevant.	Research questions aimed at isolating cause and effect (i.e. what is happening) are answered using high quality quasi-experimental research designs and/or quantitative observational studies . They are sufficient in number to have resulted in the production of a systematic review or meta-analysis. Research questions aimed at exploring meaning (i.e. why and how something is happening) are considered through an array of structured qualitative observational research methods directly addressing contextual issues.	We are confident that the intervention does or does not have the effect anticipated. The body of evidence is diverse and credible, with the findings convincing and stable.
Medium	Moderate quality studies, medium size evidence body, moderate level of consistency. Studies may or may not be contextually relevant.	Research questions aimed at isolating cause and effect (i.e. what is happening) are answered using moderate to high-quality quantitative observational designs . Research questions aimed at exploring meaning (i.e. why and how something is happening) are considered through a restricted range of qualitative observational research methods addressing contextual issues.	We believe that the intervention may or may not have the effect anticipated. The body of evidence displays some significant shortcomings. There are reasons to think that contextual differences may unpredictably and substantially affect intervention outcomes.

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Limited	Moderate-to-low quality studies, medium size evidence body, low levels of consistency. Studies may or may not be contextually relevant.	Research questions aimed at isolating cause and effect (i.e. what is happening) are answered using moderate to low-quality quantitative observational studies . Research questions aimed at exploring meaning (i.e. why and how something is happening) are considered through a narrow range of qualitative observational research methods addressing contextual issues.	We believe that the intervention may or may not have the effect anticipated. The body of evidence displays very significant shortcomings. There are multiple reasons to think that contextual differences may substantially affect intervention outcomes.
No evidence	No/few studies exist.	Neither cause and effect, nor meaning is seriously interrogated. Any available studies are of low quality, and are contextually irrelevant.	There is no plausible evidence that the intervention does/does not have the effect indicated.

Source: DFID (2014). *How To Note: Assessing the Strength of Evidence*.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/291982/HTN-strength-evidence-march2014.pdf