

A Rapid Realist Policy Review (RRPR) of the Impact of Social Determinants on Self-harm and Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviours in England

Background

- Limited evidence exists on how policies address social factors influencing self-harm and suicidal behaviour.
- Past reviews often ignore self-harm and vary in how they define social determinants, making conclusions difficult.
- A realist approach helps fill these gaps by using diverse evidence beyond traditional methods.
- Underpinned by the Pirkis et al. (2024) model, offering a lens to understand and apply social determinants to policy documents.

Social Determinants

The broader political, social, economic and environmental factors which are often influenced by larger societal systems and structures and are deemed to be the “causes of the causes” (Braveman & Gottlieb, 2014)

Adam H G Chen |  ahgchen.bsky.social
 insite.ahgchen.uk

Public health model of suicide (adapted from Pirkis et al. 2024)

Social determinants

- Macroeconomic policies
- Public policies
- Social policies
- Legislative or regulatory frameworks
- Health-care coverage and health system capacity and responsiveness
- Local environment
- Cultural and societal values
- Social cohesion and social capital
- Commercial determinants

Individual risk factors

- Sociodemographic risk factors
- Other risk factors:
 - Contextual factors
 - Clinical factors
 - Personality-based factors
 - Genetic or familial factors
 - Neurobiological factors

Suicidal thoughts and behaviours → Suicide

Aims & Objectives

To understand how policies in England address the impact of social determinants on self-harm and suicidal thoughts and behaviours (STB)

- 1 What proximal and distal policies exist to address the impact of social determinants on self-harm and STB?
- 2 What priorities/actions are identified within policy to address the social determinants that increase the risk of self-harm and STB?
- 3 What evidence underpins/supports policies/actions aimed at addressing the social determinants of self-harm and STB?
- 4 What is the focus of policy/actions (For whom, in what circumstances and why is the policy intended to work)?

Why I’m adapting the process

- Traditional Rapid Realist Reviews assess academic and grey literature (Saul et al., 2013); this adapted version focuses on policy documents and related evidence to explore how policies address social factors behind self-harm and suicidal behaviour.
- The RRPR method uniquely classifies documents based on their proximity to policy actions (proximal vs. distal).

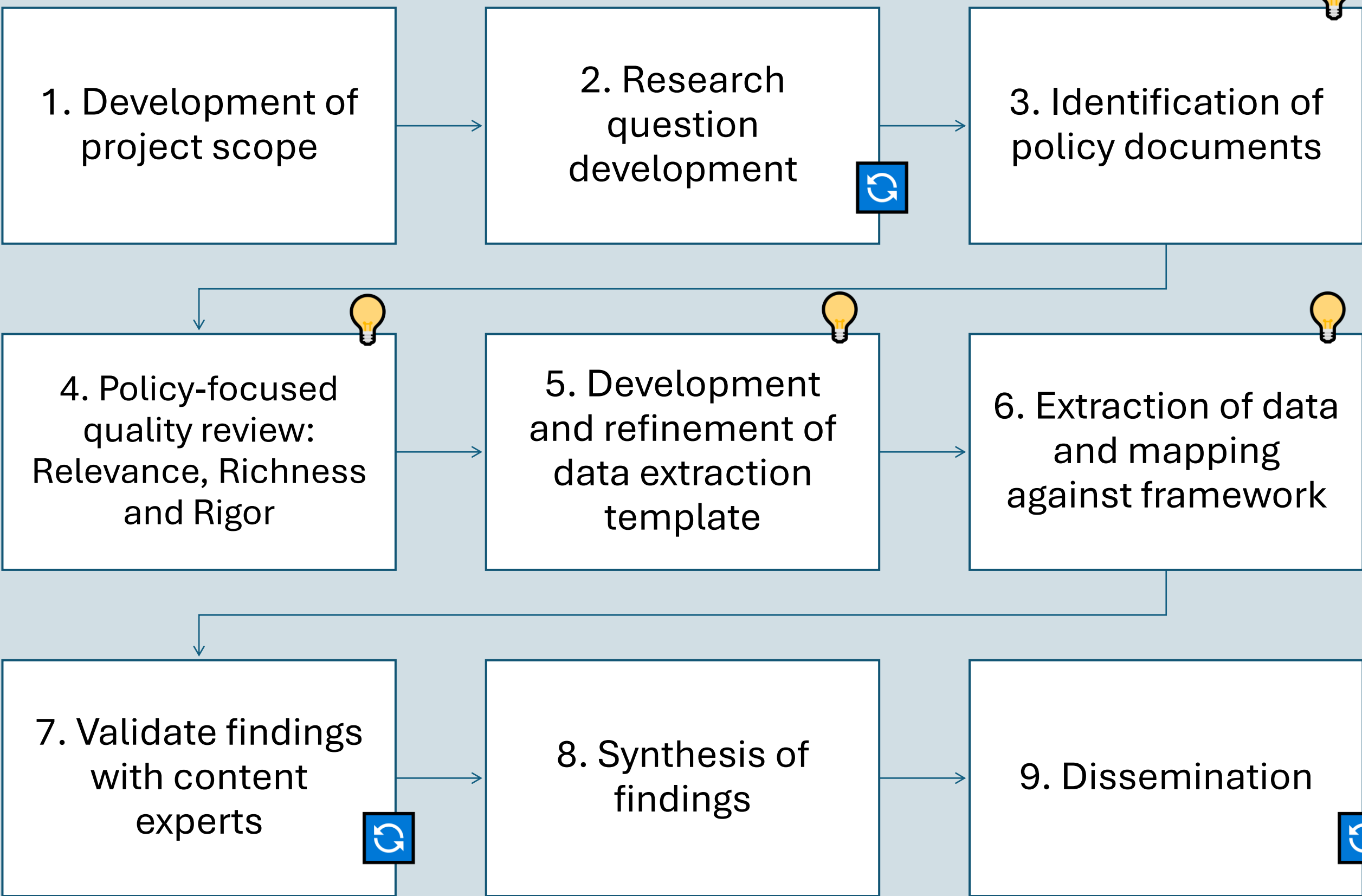
Search strategy

- Searching policy documents on GOV.UK, snowballing and drawing on knowledge/content experts in policy and mental health
- Using a policy-focused timeline: the first National Suicide Prevention Strategy in 2002 to 2023 the most recent.
- Policy document search terms: ‘suicide’ ‘self-harm’ and ‘mental health’

Synthesis

- Realist methodology tests theory through causal statements typically conveyed as ‘if ... then’ statements extracted from evidence (Jagosh et al., 2012).
- Context-Mechanism-Outcome configurations are developed to refine an initial programme theory which then is validated by content experts and refined (Pawson, 2006).

Methodology



Outcomes

- 1 To understand for whom, in what circumstances, and why policies and actions intended to address the impacts of social determinants of suicide, STB and self-harm in England
- 2 The generation of a novel approach to rapid realist reviews.
- 3 Provide insight into proximal and distal implications of policies on suicidal thoughts, behaviours and self-harm.
- 4 Findings will also inform subsequent empirical research that form a PhD project, which involves three distinct but interrelated studies regarding the social determinants of youth suicide and self-harm.

References

- Braveman, P., & Gottlieb, L. (2014). The Social Determinants of Health: It's Time to Consider the Causes of the Causes. *Public Health Reports*, 129(1_suppl2), 19-31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00333549141291S206>
- Jagosh, J., Macaulay, A. C., Pluye, P., Salsberg, J., Bush, P. L., Henderson, J., Sirett, E., Wong, G., Cargo, M., Herbert, C. P., Seifer, S. D., Green, L. W., & Greenhalgh, T. (2012). Uncovering the benefits of participatory research: implications of a realist review for health research and practice. *Milbank Q*, 90(2), 311-346. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0009.2012.00665.x>
- Pawson, R. (2006). Digging for Nuggets: How ‘Bad’ Research Can Yield ‘Good’ Evidence. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 9(2), 127-142. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570600595314>
- Pirkis, J., Dandona, R., Silverman, M., Khan, M., & Hawton, K. (2024). Preventing suicide: a public health approach to a global problem. *The Lancet Public Health*, 9(10), e787-e795. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667\(24\)00149-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(24)00149-X)
- Saul, J. E., Willis, C. D., Bitz, J., & Best, A. (2013). A time-responsive tool for informing policy making: rapid realist review. *Implementation Science*, 8(1), 103. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1748-5908-8-103>

Supervisors: Dr Maria Michail, Dr Nicola Wright and Dr Isabel Morales-Muñoz
Specialists: Dr Sarah-Jane Fenton, the Institute for Mental Health Youth Advisory Group

