A Review of Femicide Victimization and Perpetration in Africa

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Introduction and Rationale

Violence against women (VAW), a multidimensional construct that has been documented as both an infamous and universal feature of human history (World Health Organization, 2002), refers to an act of gender-based violence (GBV) likely to result in the physical, social, sexual or psychological harm of women (United Nations, n.d.). The murder of women represents the most extreme consequence of VAW (Abrahams et al., 2012; Garcia-Moreno et al., 2012). Specifically, 'femicide' (i.e. the intentional use of VAW resulting in a woman's death) (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2012), distinct from male homicide, is an overarching term that encompasses the "killing of women" (Abrahams et al., 2013, p. 3). Femicide, based on both the motive and victim-perpetrator relationship, may result in more specific definitions which include: 'intimate femicide', 'non-intimate femicide', 'murder in the name of honour', and 'dowry-related killing' (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2012). Given that these nuanced definitions exist, they are all nonetheless related to the 'intentional killing of a woman'; thus, the term 'femicide', for this study, will be taken to mean 'all-male perpetrated intimate and non-intimate female homicides of victims aged 18 years and older' – irrespective of the motive of the homicide.

Globally, 87 000 women were intentionally killed in 2017, representing a global femicide rate of 1.3 per 100 000 (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2019). In addition to this, 60,4% of all femicides occurred in Africa – representing a femicide rate of 3.1 per 100 000 (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2019). Despite the more than double femicide rate in Africa, a notable lack of data can reliably provide an overview of VAW in the African context (Dunkle et al., 2004; Shannon et al., 2009). Given the lack of appropriate data in the African context and Africa's high contribution to the global count of femicide cases, it is essential to systematically review and critically appraise the available evidence from femicide research in particular. Specifically, it is imperative to identify, synthesize, understand, and discuss the socio-demographic, clinical, forensic, and criminological characteristics of femicide victims and offenders in the African context in a bid to inform future intervention initiatives aimed at addressing VAW and femicide more broadly.

Objectives

To systematically review empirical research in order to identify, synthesize, understand, and discuss the socio-demographic, clinical, forensic, and criminological characteristics of femicide victims and offenders.

Methodology

In this paper, a convergent mixed method systematic review research design (Higgins et al., 2019) will initially inform the development of a PRISMA protocol (Moher et al., 2015) which, consequently, will be used to guide the systematic review method enabling the identification, evaluation, and subsequent summarization of data obtained from published literature that examines the socio-demographic, clinical, forensic, and criminological characteristics of femicide victims and offenders.

Review procedure

The employment of a systematic analysis, in accord with the 27-item checklist (see appendix A) and four-phase flow diagram (see appendix B), will ensure full compliance with the checklist items and enable the development of a clear, transparent, and structured report that has a: (1) specified research question, (2) clearly stated title and objectives, (3) comprehensive strategy guiding the identification of relevant empirical publications, (4) distinct and justifiable inclusion and exclusion criteria, (5) rigorous synthesis of the reviewed empirical publications, and (6) methodological analysis of the eligible empirical publications. In addition to the development of a PRISMA informed research report, this research report will adhere to the eight stage procedure for conducting a systematic review recommended by Uman (2011) in order to increase transparency and limit bias which, in turn, improves the validity of the reported findings.

Stage 1: Formulate the review question

- What are the socio-demographic, clinical, forensic, and criminological characteristics of femicide victims and offenders?

Stage 2: Define the inclusion and exclusion criteria

In order for published literature to be included in the sample that will be systematically reviewed, a purposive sampling technique informed by SPIDER (Cooke et al., 2012) will be employed. Full text empirical articles will be included in the sample on the following basis: (1) the identified studies sampled femicide victims (aged >= 18 years old) residing in Africa; (2) the phenomena under investigation within the identified studies relates to femicide in Africa;

(3) study research designs ought be either an observational, cohort, case control study; and (4) studies may only be of a quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method nature.

It is noted that articles with both positive and negative outcomes will be included to reduce the occurrence of publication bias. Moreover, articles that are written in English and are published between January 1992 and 30 July 2021 – to capture the most relevant developments within the field – will be included in the sample.

Articles which do not align to the aforementioned purposive sampling inclusion criteria will be excluded. The exclusion of non-empirical articles (i.e. review articles, methodological articles, theoretical articles, editorial articles and case studies) will be premised on their lack of explicit aims, hypotheses, and results or discussion sections; without such information, one cannot attain a sense of clarity in relation to the specific constructs or variables being assessed within the sample of articles. Similarly, grey literature will be excluded on the basis of not being peer reviewed; peer reviewed research is characteristically considered more rigorous (Laher & Hasseem, In press).

Stage 3: Develop the search strategy and locate studies

Search terms that will guide the identification of potentially relevant articles in the sample were developed and then critically appraised by the Knowledge and Information Service Unit of the South African Medical Research Council.

The following search terms will be used: “partner*” **OR** “spous*” **OR** “lover*” **OR** “couple*” **OR** “co-habiting” **OR** “common-law” **OR** “mar*” **OR** “divorce*” **OR** “wife*” **OR** "wive*" **OR** "girl*” **OR** “female” **OR** “husband*” **OR** “boy*” **AND** “femicide” **OR** "feminicide" **OR** “uxoricide” **OR** “homicide” **OR** “victim*” **OR** “violen*” **OR** “kill*” **OR** “murder*” **OR** "death*" **OR** "die*" **AND** "Afri*”.

Research articles will be accessed and searched for in four multidisciplinary databases (i.e., ProQuest, Web of Science, EBSCO, PubMed).

Stage 4: Select the appropriate studies

First, the titles and abstracts from the identified studies will be screened by two independent reviewers (i.e. Reviewer 1 and Reviewer 2) to assess their eligibility. Studies which are

incompatible with the aforementioned inclusion criteria and studies which adhere to the exclusion criteria will be excluded from the sample. Second, the titles, abstracts and full texts of the remaining articles will be examined to ensure their eligibility for inclusion into the sample. Notably, the full texts of the remaining articles will be assessed against the aforementioned inclusion criteria, whilst a PRISMA flow diagram (see appendix B) will be used to illustrate the screening process.

Stage 5: Extract the appropriate data

In relation to each study included in the sample, relevant data providing an overview of the study's characteristics (including year of publication, research aims, study designs, types of analyses) will be extracted. Moreover, information pertaining to the study's sample, phenomena under investigation, design, and research type will be obtained. It is noted that each study within the sample will be downloaded into a reference manager (i.e. Zotero) which will enable their assessment by critical appraisal tools and data analytic techniques.

Stage 6: Assess the quality of the appropriate studies

Articles in the sample will be assessed for potential bias. The quality of quantitative studies will be assessed through their reliability, validity, and objectivity, whilst qualitative studies will be assessed through their credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability; mixed method studies will be assessed through a combination of quantitative and qualitative assessment characteristics. It is noted that eligible quantitative studies will be assessed via the adapted version (Laher & Hasseem, In press) of the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) Qualitative Checklist Tool (see appendix C) and eligible qualitative studies will be assessed via the CASP Tool Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) Qualitative Checklist Tool (see appendix D); mixed method studies will be assessed by both the aforementioned tools.

Stage 7: Analyze and interpret the appropriate results

As a result of studies in the sample being qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method in nature, the following data analytic techniques will be employed to guide the analysis and subsequent interpretation of the data.

Thematic synthesis

A thematic synthesis method developed by Thomas & Harden (2008) will be used to analyze qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method studies. As per Thomas & Harden (2008), a thematic synthesis is conducted through three stages which include: "the coding of text line-by-line..., the development of descriptive themes..., and the generation of analytic themes..." (p. 1). Notably, the development of descriptive themes and analytic themes within the thematic synthesis will be informed by the findings of reflexive thematic analysis developed by Braun et al. (2019).

First, the reviewer 1 and reviewer 2 will independently familiarize themselves with the data through reading and rereading the textual data (Braun et al., 2019). Second, codes will be independently generated through an inductive orientation (Braun et al., 2019). Third, candidate themes will be independently developed through the collation of codes from the dataset (Braun et al., 2019). Fourth, candidate themes will be thematically mapped in order to visually establish potential themes and their associated subthemes (Braun et al., 2019). Fifth, candidate themes will be revised and defined to ensure that themes and theme names clearly, comprehensively, and concisely represent the data (Braun et al., 2019). Sixth, reviewer 1 and reviewer 2 will critically appraise candidate themes in order to establish consistency between analyses; thereafter, a report containing the findings will be produced in a concise, non-repetitive and coherent manner (Braun et al., 2019).

Content analysis

In relation to this study, content analysis will be utilized to analyze qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method studies. Specifically, content analyses will be employed to methodically code and categorize data in an unobtrusive manner to ensure replicable and valid inferences from the data (Elo & Kyngas, 2008; Graham & Ismail, 2011; Seedat et al., 2004). Moreover, the employment of content analysis will provide insight, knowledge, and objective trends which exist in the data; content analysis will similarly ensure that identified trends will act as a baseline to which the themes from the reflective thematic analysis can be compared (Elo & Kyngas, 2008; Graham & Shirley, 2014; Joffe & Yardley, 2004; Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

The systematic utilization of content analysis will occur in the following steps. First, reviewer 1 and reviewer 2 will familiarize themselves with the textual data by reading and

rereading the articles (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). Second, key words (units of analysis) will arise from analytical constructs originating from the recurrence of themes within the articles (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). Third, themes reported from the reflexive thematic analysis will be coded according to underlying constructs. Fourth, constructs will be categorized in a structured matrix (Elo & Kyngas, 2008).

Stage 8: Disseminate the findings

Drawing on the subsequent findings which emerge after the aforementioned data analytic techniques, conclusions and a critical synthesis will be carried out. Specifically, the strengths and weaknesses of the findings will be discussed with reference to recommendations that can inform future research within the realm of femicide research in particular. In addition, this study will be written up and submitted to a journal for publication. In addition to this, the findings from this systematically review will be disseminated at conference proceedings when the opportunities arise.

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Appendix A: Prisma Checklist

PRISMA 2009 Checklist

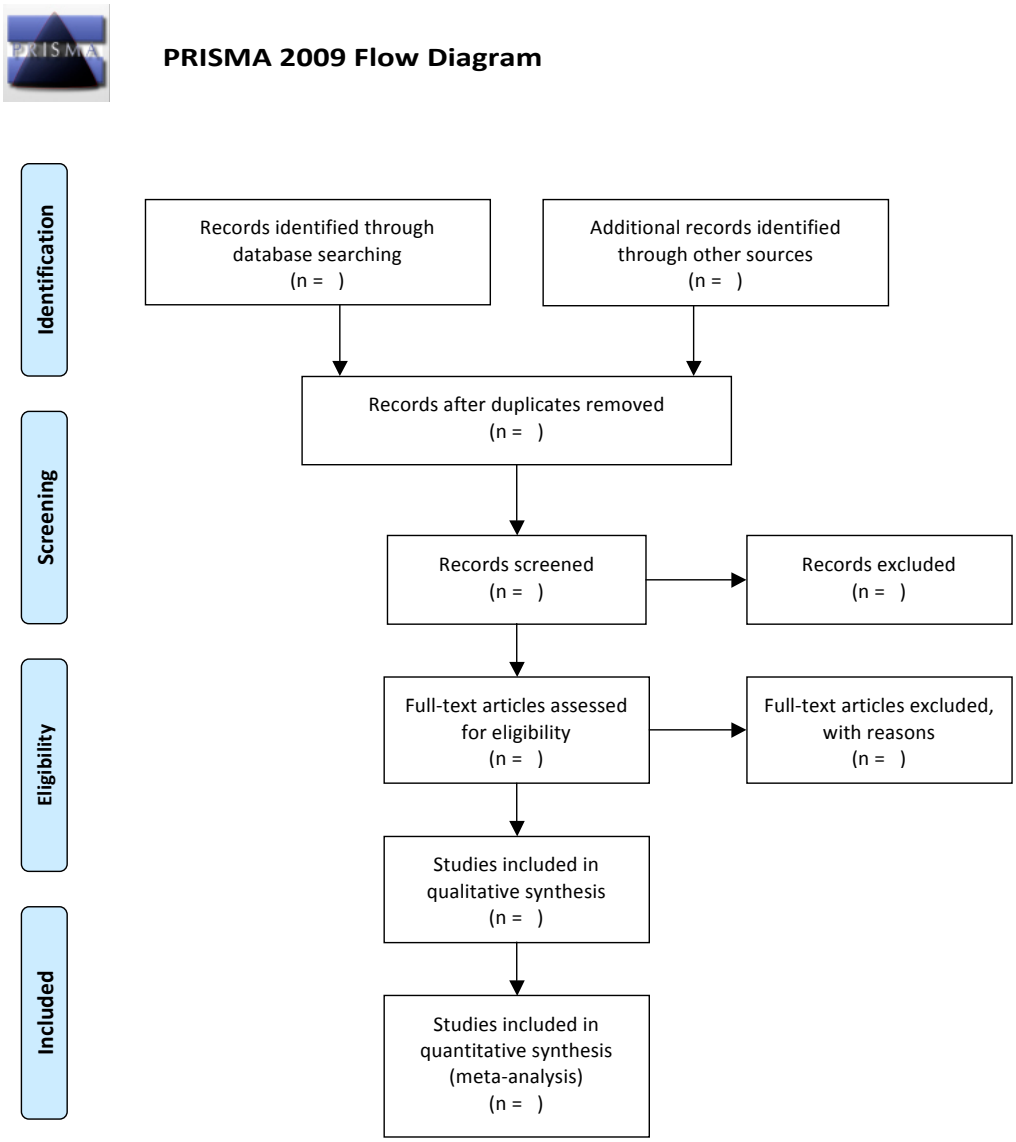
Section/topic	#	Checklist item	Reported on page #
TITLE			
Title	1	Identify the report as a systematic review, meta-analysis, or both.	
ABSTRACT			
Structured summary	2	Provide a structured summary including, as applicable: background; objectives; data sources; study eligibility criteria, participants, and interventions; study appraisal and synthesis methods; results; limitations; conclusions and implications of key findings; systematic review registration number.	
INTRODUCTION			
Rationale	3	Describe the rationale for the review in the context of what is already known.	
Objectives	4	Provide an explicit statement of questions being addressed with reference to participants, interventions, comparisons, outcomes, and study design (PICOS).	
METHODS			
Protocol and registration	5	Indicate if a review protocol exists, if and where it can be accessed (e.g., Web address), and, if available, provide registration information including registration number.	
Eligibility criteria	6	Specify study characteristics (e.g., PICOS, length of follow-up) and report characteristics (e.g., years considered, language, publication status) used as criteria for eligibility, giving rationale.	
Information sources	7	Describe all information sources (e.g., databases with dates of coverage, contact with study authors to identify additional studies) in the search and date last searched.	
Search	8	Present full electronic search strategy for at least one database, including any limits used, such that it could be repeated.	
Study selection	9	State the process for selecting studies (i.e., screening, eligibility, included in systematic review, and, if applicable, included in the meta-analysis).	
Data collection process	10	Describe method of data extraction from reports (e.g., piloted forms, independently, in duplicate) and any processes for obtaining and confirming data from investigators.	
Data items	11	List and define all variables for which data were sought (e.g., PICOS, funding sources) and any assumptions and simplifications made.	
Risk of bias in individual studies	12	Describe methods used for assessing risk of bias of individual studies (including specification of whether this was done at the study or outcome level), and how this information is to be used in any data synthesis.	
Summary measures	13	State the principal summary measures (e.g., risk ratio, difference in means).	
Synthesis of results	14	Describe the methods of handling data and combining results of studies, if done, including measures of consistency (e.g., I^2) for each meta-analysis.	

PRISMA 2009 Checklist

Section/topic	#	Checklist item	Reported on page #
Risk of bias across studies	15	Specify any assessment of risk of bias that may affect the cumulative evidence (e.g., publication bias, selective reporting within studies).	
Additional analyses	16	Describe methods of additional analyses (e.g., sensitivity or subgroup analyses, meta-regression), if done, indicating which were pre-specified.	
RESULTS			
Study selection	17	Give numbers of studies screened, assessed for eligibility, and included in the review, with reasons for exclusions at each stage, ideally with a flow diagram.	
Study characteristics	18	For each study, present characteristics for which data were extracted (e.g., study size, PICOS, follow-up period) and provide the citations.	
Risk of bias within studies	19	Present data on risk of bias of each study and, if available, any outcome level assessment (see item 12).	
Results of individual studies	20	For all outcomes considered (benefits or harms), present, for each study: (a) simple summary data for each intervention group (b) effect estimates and confidence intervals, ideally with a forest plot.	
Synthesis of results	21	Present results of each meta-analysis done, including confidence intervals and measures of consistency.	
Risk of bias across studies	22	Present results of any assessment of risk of bias across studies (see Item 15).	
Additional analysis	23	Give results of additional analyses, if done (e.g., sensitivity or subgroup analyses, meta-regression [see Item 16]).	
DISCUSSION			
Summary of evidence	24	Summarize the main findings including the strength of evidence for each main outcome; consider their relevance to key groups (e.g., healthcare providers, users, and policy makers).	
Limitations	25	Discuss limitations at study and outcome level (e.g., risk of bias), and at review-level (e.g., incomplete retrieval of identified research, reporting bias).	
Conclusions	26	Provide a general interpretation of the results in the context of other evidence, and implications for future research.	
FUNDING			
Funding	27	Describe sources of funding for the systematic review and other support (e.g., supply of data); role of funders for the systematic review.	

From: Moher D, Liberati A, Tetzlaff J, Altman DG, The PRISMA Group (2009). Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses: The PRISMA Statement. PLoS Med 6(7): e1000097. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed1000097

Appendix B: PRISMA Flow Diagram



From: Moher D, Liberati A, Tetzlaff J, Altman DG, The PRISMA Group (2009). *P*referred *R*eporting *I*tems for *S*ystematic Reviews and *M*eta-*A*nalyses: The PRISMA Statement. PLoS Med 6(7): e1000097. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed1000097

For more information, visit www.prisma-statement.org.

Appendix C: CASP Tool

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info@casp-uk.net
Summertown Pavilion, Middle Way Oxford OX2 7LG

CASP Checklist: 10 questions to help you make sense of a Qualitative research

How to use this appraisal tool: Three broad issues need to be considered when appraising a qualitative study:

- Are the results of the study valid? (Section A)
- What are the results? (Section B)
- Will the results help locally? (Section C)

The 10 questions on the following pages are designed to help you think about these issues systematically. The first two questions are screening questions and can be answered quickly. If the answer to both is "yes", it is worth proceeding with the remaining questions. There is some degree of overlap between the questions, you are asked to record a "yes", "no" or "can't tell" to most of the questions. A number of italicised prompts are given after each question. These are designed to remind you why the question is important. Record your reasons for your answers in the spaces provided.

About: These checklists were designed to be used as educational pedagogic tools, as part of a workshop setting, therefore we do not suggest a scoring system. The core CASP checklists (randomised controlled trial & systematic review) were based on JAMA 'Users' guides to the medical literature 1994 (adapted from Guyatt GH, Sackett DL, and Cook DJ), and piloted with health care practitioners.

For each new checklist, a group of experts were assembled to develop and pilot the checklist and the workshop format with which it would be used. Over the years overall adjustments have been made to the format, but a recent survey of checklist users reiterated that the basic format continues to be useful and appropriate.

Referencing: we recommend using the Harvard style citation, i.e.: *Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (2018). CASP (insert name of checklist i.e. Qualitative) Checklist. [online] Available at: URL. Accessed: Date Accessed.*

CASP
Critical Appraisal Skills Programme

Paper for appraisal and reference: .....

Section A: Are the results valid?

1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?

Yes ☐ Can't Tell ☐ No ☐

HINT: Consider
- what was the goal of the research
- why it was thought important
- its relevance

Comments:

2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?

Yes ☐ Can't Tell ☐ No ☐

HINT: Consider
- If the research seeks to interpret or illuminate the actions and/or subjective experiences of research participants
- Is qualitative research the right methodology for addressing the research goal

Comments:

Is it worth continuing?

3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?

Yes ☐ Can't Tell ☐ No ☐

HINT: Consider
- if the researcher has justified the research design (e.g. have they discussed how they decided which method to use)

Comments:

CASP
Critical Appraisal Skills Programme

4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?

Yes ☐
Can't Tell ☐
No ☐

HINT: Consider
- If the researcher has explained how the participants were selected
- If they explained why the participants they selected were the most appropriate to provide access to the type of knowledge sought by the study
- If there are any discussions around recruitment (e.g. why some people chose not to take part)

Comments:

5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?

Yes ☐
Can't Tell ☐
No ☐

HINT: Consider
- If the setting for the data collection was justified
- If it is clear how data were collected (e.g. focus group, semi-structured interview etc.)
- If the researcher has justified the methods chosen
- If the researcher has made the methods explicit (e.g. for interview method, is there an indication of how interviews are conducted, or did they use a topic guide)
- If methods were modified during the study. If so, has the researcher explained how and why
- If the form of data is clear (e.g. tape recordings, video material, notes etc.)
- If the researcher has discussed saturation of data

Comments:

CASP
Critical Appraisal Skills Programme

6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?

Yes ☐
Can't Tell ☐
No ☐

HINT: Consider
- If the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during (a) formulation of the research questions (b) data collection, including sample recruitment and choice of location
- How the researcher responded to events during the study and whether they considered the implications of any changes in the research design

Comments:

Section B: What are the results?

7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?

Yes ☐
Can't Tell ☐
No ☐

HINT: Consider
- If there are sufficient details of how the research was explained to participants for the reader to assess whether ethical standards were maintained
- If the researcher has discussed issues raised by the study (e.g. issues around informed consent or confidentiality or how they have handled the effects of the study on the participants during and after the study)
- If approval has been sought from the ethics committee

Comments:

CASP
Critical Appraisal Skills Programme

8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?

Yes ☐
Can't Tell ☐
No ☐

HINT: Consider
- If there is an in-depth description of the analysis process
- If thematic analysis is used. If so, is it clear how the categories/themes were derived from the data
- Whether the researcher explains how the data presented were selected from the original sample to demonstrate the analysis process
- If sufficient data are presented to support the findings
- To what extent contradictory data are taken into account
- Whether the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during analysis and selection of data for presentation

Comments:

9. Is there a clear statement of findings?

Yes ☐
Can't Tell ☐
No ☐

HINT: Consider whether
- If the findings are explicit
- If there is adequate discussion of the evidence both for and against the researcher's arguments
- If the researcher has discussed the credibility of their findings (e.g. triangulation, respondent validation, more than one analyst)
- If the findings are discussed in relation to the original research question

Comments:

CASP
Critical Appraisal Skills Programme

Section C: Will the results help locally?

10. How valuable is the research?

HINT: Consider

- If the researcher discusses the contribution the study makes to existing knowledge or understanding (e.g. do they consider the findings in relation to current practice or policy, or relevant research-based literature
- If they identify new areas where research is necessary
- If the researchers have discussed whether or how the findings can be transferred to other populations or considered other ways the research may be used

Comments:

Appendix D: Adapted CASP for Quant.

1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?

Yes Can't tell No

Consider: What was the goal of the research? Why it was thought important? Its relevance

2. Is a quantitative methodology appropriate?

Yes Can't tell No

Consider: If the research seeks to examine a relationship between variables or comparison of groups. Is quantitative research the right methodology for addressing the research goal?

Were all the participants accounted for in the results and the conclusion?

Yes Can't tell No

Is it worth continuing?

Detailed questions:

3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?

Yes Can't tell No

Consider: If the researcher has justified the research design (E.g. have they discussed how they decided which method to use)?

4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research? (Assess selection bias)

Yes Can't tell No

Consider: If the researcher has explained how the participants were selected, Are the individuals selected to participate in this study likely to be representative of the target population? If there are any discussions around recruitment (e.g. why some people chose not to take part)

5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?

Yes Can't tell No

Consider: If the setting for data collection was justified. If it is clear how data were collected. If the researcher has justified the methods chosen. If the researcher has made the methods explicit . Were data collection tools shown to be valid? Were data collection tools shown to be reliable? If methods were modified during the study. If so, has the researcher explained how and why?

7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?

Yes Can't tell No

Consider: If there are sufficient details of how the research was explained to participants for the reader to assess whether ethical standards were maintained. If the researcher has discussed issues raised by the study (e.g. issues around informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality or how they have handled the effects of the study on the participants during and after the study). If approval has been sought from the ethics committee

8. Was the correct statistical technique used to analyse the data

Yes Can't tell No

Consider: Was descriptive data provided? Was the sample size large enough for the statistical technique carried out? Was basic assumptions of the statistical test utilised met? Were both significant and insignificant results reported? Did the statistical technique used effectively answer the research question?

9. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?

Yes Can't tell No

Consider: If there is an in-depth description of the analysis process. Were the statistical methods appropriate for the study design? If sufficient data are presented to support the findings? To what extent contradictory data are taken into account? Were potential sources of bias discussed?

10. Were psychometric properties discussed?

Yes Can't tell No

Consider: were reliability and validity of the instruments used discussed or analysed

11. Is there a clear statement of findings?

Yes Can't tell No

Consider: If the findings are explicit. If there is adequate discussion of the evidence both for and against the researcher's arguments. If the findings are discussed in relation to the original research question

12. How valuable is the research?

Consider: If the researcher discusses the contribution the study makes to existing knowledge or understanding e.g. do they consider the findings in relation to current practice or policy? Or relevant research-based literature? If they identify new areas where research is necessary? If the researchers have discussed whether or how the findings can be transferred to other populations or considered other ways, the research may be used