



BMHP5019 – Introduction to Independent Research Skills

Title

**A Scoping Review of Digital Exclusion among Older Adults Accessing UK Healthcare:
Identifying Themes Using Aveyard's Simplified Thematic Analysis**

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Background and Rationale

In the UK, digital health is becoming a common way to book appointments, access test results, conduct video appointments, and have access to health information. But, older people with limited access to the Internet, low digital confidence, disability, language barriers, or privacy concerns can be excluded from digital services. Access to digital services is significant for health and social care as it can limit patients' choices, delay care, and exacerbate health inequalities. In the UK, health inequalities need to be taken into account in digital healthcare delivery, as demonstrated by Farre et al. (2023). Likewise, Badr, Motulsky and Denis (2024) maintain that digital health technology can also enhance access, but can also reinforce social inequalities.

Research Aim, Question and Objectives

This scoping review seeks to chart current knowledge about digital exclusion within older adults' access to healthcare in the UK. There is a review question: What are the main themes in the literature around digital exclusion of older adults accessing UK health services? The objectives are to identify the main barriers to digital healthcare access, explore the reported effects on older adults, and highlight recommendations for inclusive practice.

Methodology

A scoping review design is appropriate for this study as the topic is broad and a simple mapping of existing evidence is needed, not the testing of one intervention. The review will be carried out using McMeekin et al., (2020) framework for conducting reviews, with the stages recommended by Kuo et al., (2022) being defined as clear and systematic. This will involve recognising the question, conducting literature searches, choosing studies, charting and reporting themes. Similarly, Peters et al. (2020) endorse case-to-case & structured scoping review approaches for knowledge synthesis. A database search will be conducted including CINAHL, PubMed, Google Scholar and ASSIA. The search terms will include: digital exclusion, digital health, older adults, health inequalities, UK healthcare and access to care. Studies will be included if: They are published in English in a peer-reviewed publication between 2015 and 2026, and relate to digital access in health and social care for older adults in the UK. Excluded will be non-UK studies, non-academic sources and studies not focussed on access to digital health. Following the guidance of PRISMA-ScR Eschiti & Siaki, (2026), the

findings will be reported. Thematic analysis will be used to analyse the data, following Aveyard's (2023) simplified thematic analysis process, which will aim to uncover any common themes arising from the selected studies.

Ethical Considerations and Expected Outcomes

This is secondary research; no participants will be recruited. Ethical practice will be in reference to the work, avoiding plagiarism, and representing authors fairly and using credible sources only. The review will be expected to highlight factors which impede the achievement of digital exclusion in UK healthcare, along with practice recommendations for what to do about it.

References

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