

## Content analysis of rehabilitation definitions for research purposes

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**Background.** Cochrane Rehabilitation (CR) found problems with current rehabilitation definitions in identifying all Cochrane Reviews of rehabilitation interest (“tagging”), in the possible inappropriate use of the term “rehabilitation” (according to Rehabilitation stakeholders perception) in the title of some Cochrane Systematic Reviews (CSRs) and in the development of the Package of Rehabilitation Interventions with the World Health Organization (WHO).

**Objectives.** The aim of this study was to carry on a content analysis on the current definitions of rehabilitation from three major sources: rehabilitation stakeholders, users (represented in Google) and scientists (represented by CSRs).

**Methods.** The study included three parts: a) a survey about rehabilitation definitions used by the major rehabilitation stakeholders represented by the CR Advisory Board; b) the definitions reported in Google: 6 searches from all the continents have been performed and the first 200 results from each have been stored and studied; c) the search of the definition inside CSRs including those that had the term “rehabilitation” in the title and/or abstract. We collected all the descriptions of rehabilitation inside each selected CSRs. We performed (1) a frequency analysis for the identified definitions, (2) a semantic analysis, looking for the word roots (e.g. function\* to include all words like function, functioning, functional, etc) that recurred most and (3) the number of definitions that included the most used roots.

**Results.** The survey received 37 answers (response rate 76%) including 31 definitions. The 5 most common word roots were function\*, health\*, person\*, disabil\* and process\*. The Google searches returned 1240 unique websites from which 239 total and 128 unique definitions were retrieved. The frequency analysis showed that one definition was repeated 70 time whilst 108 had a single occurrence. The 6 most common word roots were process\*, restor\*, health\*, person\*, function\*, and condition\*. The content analysis showed that in 71% of the definitions “rehabilitation” is qualified with a noun, being “process” the most common. From Cochrane Library, 93 CSRs met the inclusion criteria, 52 did not include any definition, 56 (62%) presented the term “rehabilitation” in the title and of these 11 presented a complete definition. The five most common words used in the definitions were: rehabilitation, training, exercise, patient, intervention.

**Conclusions.** The results showed that a unique rehabilitation definition does not exist. A sort of intuitive and common understanding is present and consistent between different stakeholders, opinion leaders and users. The results from CSRs highlighted the centrality of the intervention. Therefore, a more complete definition of rehabilitation is needed. In this direction, Cochrane Rehabilitation is working on a Consensus process to identify a more specific definition of rehabilitation suitable for research purposes that also defines inclusion and exclusion criteria.

**Patient or healthcare consumer involvement.** Not applicable.