

# Review of: "How many papers are published each week reporting on trials of interventions involving behavioural aspects of health?"

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An interesting and important paper. I guess a more polished gloss could have been put on it by reporting more about the sentence "We calculated the proportion that were judged to be in scope and used this to adjust the estimate of the number of papers in the target domain." Was there an inter-rater reliability check there? However, that's really just academic nitpicking as the thrust of the paper is clear and the numbers, as the authors say, are going to survive any such nitpicking and will continue to show that the digestion of all this literature is beyond human wetware, or any foreseeable waste of money on such an enterprise. There is an argument that this volume of output might be digested by AI methods as the authors suggest and it's surely clear that if there were systems like the Paper Authoring Tool (PAT) one they cite such an AI digestion might be more feasible.

Another possible carp at the paper is that the referencing seems a bit close to the authors. Having said that, again this doesn't change anything and is perhaps an antiquated and rather culture bound madness about not boasting!

My main reason for applauding the paper is that it highlights the lemming/ostrich problems with our research and research funding systems that are generally avoided. My big concern is that that the authors could have gone further. I believe we need a more radical rethink of what we are doing in research into "behavioural aspects of health". The paper underlines that the relentless production of trials has gone beyond any currently rational digestion. Furthermore it is driven by the "gold standard" overvaluation of RCTs which in this realm can almost never have double blindness so can almost never detach "pure effects" from expectancy and placebo/nocebo effects (in the participants, assessors and/or researchers).

This has created a sort of mad pursuit of a holy grail of definite answers to questions which may not address the truly large threats to human health: inequities of wealth and income, climate change and species and habitat loss? These method and trials are individualist (right down to the often violated statistical idea of "independence of observations" and neglect the whole anthropology and sociology of health, health care and health prevention. I was a bit sorry, given my knowledge of the first author's interest in politics of health risks not to have seen these issues referenced.