2.6.2 Review question

Clarity in the review questions assists in developing a protocol and also ultimately, the conduct of the review proper. The review question's guide and direct the development of the specific review criteria and facilitate more effective searching, and provides a structure for the development of the full review report. Although a range of mnemonics have been described for different types of review (and research) questions, for a JBI qualitative synthesis, the PICo mnemonic also be used to construct a clear and meaningful question for a JBI systematic review of qualitative evidence. The PICo mnemonic stands for the Population, the Phenomena of Interest and the Context. There is no need for an outcome statement in qualitative synthesis (see Chapter 3). The expression of the phenomena of interest represents the outcome, therefore a specific outcome section or statement is not recommended in meta aggregation.

The review question and PICo mnemonic can provide potential readers with a significant amount of information about the focus, scope and applicability of a review to their needs. It should be apparent if the review is examining meaning or lived experience or a specific phenomena of interest is to be examined. Similarly, including the context in the question assists readers to situate the review.

A qualitative review will have a primary question. If that question sufficiently addresses the review objectives, there is no need for secondary or sub questions. However, as per the illustrations below, some questions benefit from one or more sub questions that delve into particular attributes of context, population or phenomena of interest.

For example, the primary question (aligned directly to the objective) below relates to the nursing profession, however, the sub questions delve into the particular issues related to professionally trained nurses and student nurses as distinct sub populations (Rittenmeyer et al. 2012):

What are the experiences of lateral or horizontal violence in the profession of nursing?

- What is the experience of lateral or horizontal violence for professional nurses?
- What is the experience of lateral or horizontal violence for student nurses?

In this example, the PICo elements can be readily identified: the Population of interest are nurses, professional or student. The Phenomenon of interest is their experience with lateral or horizontal violence and the context, which has not been explicitly stated in the question in this case may be in tertiary care or in the health system of a particular country for example.