Top-Down vs. Bottom-Up Searching with *PsycInfo* and Google Scholar

Topic: Researching efficacy of trauma-focused therapy interventions in reducing re-occurring experiences of homelessness in populations of adult women. Especially interested in systematic reviews, meta-analyses.

**Top-down Searching in *PsycInfo***

“Top-down” searching involves discovering the “aboutness” of items you are trying to find. How would an indexer index the item? If controlled vocabulary is available in the database, which subject terms would be used?

For this topic, prominent keywords appear to be: trauma, or perhaps trauma-focused therapy, intervention, homelessness, women. Notice that I didn’t say “adult” women, since women are adults. However, after further interaction with the patron, I learned that she is looking for young-adult women populations. We also need a way to account for systematic reviews and meta-analyses.

Let’s look up these keywords using the *PsycInfo* online thesaurus to see what controlled vocabulary is used. Table 1 shows the results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Keyword Concept</th>
<th>Possible PsycInfo Thesaurus Terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trauma-focused therapy</td>
<td><em>Trauma-focused therapy</em> is not an authorized term. In fact, therapy is not authorized either. “Therapy USE Treatment” says the thesaurus. <em>Treatment</em> has 40 narrower terms, and 51 related terms. But none of these terms seems to capture the “trauma-focused therapy” notion. Perhaps use <em>Therapy</em> and <em>Trauma</em> as subject descriptors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td><em>Intervention</em> [note says “use more specific term if possible”]. Narrower terms include: <em>Crisis Intervention +</em>, <em>Early Intervention, Family Intervention, Group Intervention, School Based Intervention, and Workplace Intervention</em>. Note that <em>Crisis Intervention</em> has a plus (+) sign, denoting that this terms subdivides with additional narrower terms. When we view the entry for <em>Crisis Intervention</em>, we read the scope note: “Brief therapeutic approach which is ameliorative rather than curative of acute psychiatric emergencies. Used in such contexts as emergency rooms of psychiatric or general hospitals, or in the home or place of crisis occurrence, this treatment approach focuses on interpersonal and intrapsychic factors and environmental modification of behavior.” Perhaps it is best just to use the term <em>Intervention</em> here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homelessness</td>
<td><em>Homelessness</em> is not used, but <em>Homeless</em> is an authorized term.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Young adult women

The PsycInfo thesaurus does not encode for gender. Instead, the database has fixed fields that allow for limiting to various population groups. Among the population groups are Human, Animal, Male, Transgender, Female, Inpatient, and Outpatient.

We can select the Female option in this case.

As for the age element (“young adult”), there is a separate limiter for that, since this information is not encoded in the thesaurus either. The relevant age group in this case would be Young Adulthood (18-29 yrs).

So now we have some authorized thesaurus entries from PsycInfo. Let’s try them out in searching. I find it best to build up searches gradually, so that you can see what works and what isn’t working with your search terms, rather than just piling them on all at once. The piling on method very often leads to very few results, and then you have no idea which terms were the ones that dramatically reduced the result set.

Going to PsycInfo, we will first set out fixed field values before entering any subject descriptors, since, as already noted, gender and age are not handled by the controlled vocabulary (as is the case in many other databases), but rather with fixed field values that can easily be selected from the advanced search screen. Under the EBSCOhost interface for PsycInfo, we can select Age Group (Young Adulthood) and Population Group (Female) as shown in Figure 1.

![Figure 1](image)

If your library used the ProQuest interface for PsycInfo, then your advanced search selections would appear as in Figure 2.
Let’s now search only for the subject descriptors Homeless and Intervention, leaving out the concept of trauma-focused therapy (which proved to be problematic when trying to discover a close descriptor within the PsycInfo thesaurus).

Figure 3 shows that we entered the two search terms and changed to pull-down menu selection to SU Subjects, retrieving 107 results.
The search under the ProQuest interface is set up in a similar manner. But notice that the field name is slightly different (Figure 4).

Nevertheless, the ProQuest interface yields the same number of results, although the ordering of the results is different from the EBSCO results (Figure 5).

Now for the trauma-focused therapy aspect of our search. We already know that Trauma-focused Therapy is not an authorized descriptor. To get around that, let’s search the full text of content within PsycInfo for the phrase trauma-focused, intentionally leaving off therapy, since that aspect doesn’t add anything to the search. But even though we searched All Text (EBSCOhost interface) or Anywhere (ProQuest interface), we get no results. Also, keep in mind that when searching All Text or Anywhere we are only searching full text that is contained
within the EBSCO or ProQuest databases. Articles for which there is not full text attached will not be searched.

Since we failed to get results with our full-text searching, let’s back off the requirements a bit and search full text merely for the word *trauma*. Doing this retrieves 6 results for us within both of the interfaces. Figure 6 shows the six results under the EBSCOhost interface to *PsycInfo*.

![EBSCOhost interface](image1.png)

**Figure 6.**

Figure 7 shows the six ProQuest results.

![ProQuest interface](image2.png)

**Figure 7.**
The above exercise is largely a “top-down” approach to searching: finding the “aboutness” of items by attempting to discover how an indexer would add very principled controlled vocabulary terms to records.

It should be noted that *PsycInfo* is one of the only databases that has a field to search for “methodology.” We could have further limited our search to “systematic reviews” or “meta analysis” (see Figure 8). But as it was, we retrieved so few entries that further limiting would not have been helpful.

*Figure 8.*

**Bottom-up Searching in Google Scholar**

Now let’s see if we can do a different style of searching, one in which we do not have to attempt to think like an indexer, but rather to “think like a full text.” Try to think about the articles you ultimately wish to retrieve. What terminology or jargon would you expect to read? What methodologies would be mentioned?

With these things in mind, let’s put together a well-crafted search in Google Scholar. Let’s begin with this search: *"trauma-focused" homeless intervention "young adult" women*. I intentionally placed *trauma-focused* and *young adult* within quotation marks to keep these words together as phrases. I get 352 results from this search. So now I can afford to explore this result set with the methodologies I am looking for, adding the term *systematic review* to the search. From this I get 144 results. The patron said she also would be interested in meta-analyses. We don’t want to combine this with the systematic review search, since they would likely not be mentioned together in the same research works. So our amended search would be: *"trauma-focused" homeless intervention "young adult" women "meta-analysis."* Notice that I used the singular form for *meta-analysis*, since a work stating its research method would most likely use that form. This gives me 185 results.

Of course the researcher needs to carefully examine each of these records, since Google tends to drop terms. In other words, not all of the terms entered may appear in every one of the results.