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Research Article

Career Aspiration Interventions for Women Experiencing Vulnerability: An Overview Protocol

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Abstract

Objective: This overview protocol aims to synthesize evidence from systematic reviews and meta-analyses on the effectiveness of interventions designed to foster career aspirations and employability for women experiencing intersecting vulnerabilities.

Method: The protocol is registered in PROSPERO (CRD420251269873). We will conduct a systematic search in PubMed, Web of Science, CINAHL, PsycINFO, EBSCOhost, Embase, Cochrane Library, and Scopus for peer-reviewed systematic reviews and meta-analyses published in English between 2016 and December 2026. The search strategy, developed in adherence to PRESS guidelines, will combine keywords and MeSH terms related to vulnerable populations, women, and career development interventions. Study selection will follow PRISMA guidelines, with screening and deduplication performed in Covidence and EndNote. Primary study overlap across reviews will be assessed using citation matrices and the corrected covered area (CCA) method. The methodological quality of the included systematic reviews will be evaluated using AMSTAR-2. The six-step reflective thematic analysis will be utilized for data analysis.

Results: The primary outcome will be the identification of key components, mechanisms, and contextual factors of effective career aspiration interventions. Results will be synthesized into a thematic map and narrative summary.

Conclusion: This overview will identify and synthesize key effective intervention strategies for supporting vulnerable women's career development. This comprehensive framework will directly inform practitioners designing evidence-based programming and guide policymakers allocating funds toward the most effective, scalable models. It will also highlight critical evidence gaps and propose future research directions. Ultimately, its aim is career development and economic participation for this group of women.

Keywords: Career Aspirations, Intervention, Vulnerable, Women, Health.

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Extended Abstract

Background and Objectives

Women experiencing intersecting vulnerabilities—such as psychological traumas,disability, economic disadvantage, migration status, histories of violence, or racialized discrimination—face profound and systemic barriers to career development. These barriers often stifle career aspirations, limit access to education and networks, and perpetuate cycles of economic insecurity and marginalization. In response, a diverse array of interventions across social work, psychology, education, and community development has emerged, aiming to foster aspiration,employability, and sustainable career progression for these populations.

While primary research and systematic reviews on specific interventions or sub-populations exist, the evidence remains fragmented across disciplinary boundaries. There is a critical lack of a higher-order synthesis that maps the entire evidence landscape, evaluates the consistency and quality of findings, and identifies which intervention components are effective across different contexts of vulnerability. This overview protocol, therefore, aims to systematically integrate evidence from existing systematic reviews to provide a comprehensive, cross-disciplinary understanding of what works to support the career aspirations of vulnerable women.

Furthermore, career development theory has increasingly recognized the role of structural and systemic factors in shaping occupational outcomes, moving beyond individual deficit models toward approaches that account for contextual constraints and intersectional identities. Frameworks such as career construction theory, social cognitive career theory, and feminist career development models emphasize the dynamic interplay between personal agency and structural forces. Despite this theoretical evolution, a persistent gap remains between the complexity of vulnerable women's lived experiences and the evidence base guiding interventions. Existing systematic reviews often examine single vulnerability dimensions in isolation, leaving practitioners and policymakers without clear guidance on how to address the compounding effects of multiple, overlapping disadvantages. This overview addresses this critical gap by synthesizing evidence across disciplinary and categorical boundaries, offering a unified evidence base that reflects the multidimensional nature of vulnerability and supports more nuanced, effective, and equitable career intervention design.

Materials and Methods

This study is designed as an overview of reviews. The protocol has been registered in the PROSPERO international prospective register of systematic reviews (CRD420251269873). The methodology for this overview will adhere to the PRIOR reporting guidelines to ensure comprehensive and transparent reporting. We will conduct systematic and exhaustive searches across major electronic databases, including PubMed, Web of Science,CINAHL, PsycINFO, EBSCOhost, Embase, the Cochrane Library, and Scopus. The search strategy will target peer-reviewed systematic reviews and meta-analysis published in the English language between January 2016 and December 2026.

The methodological quality of the included systematic reviews will be rigorously evaluated using the AMSTAR-2 tool, a critical appraisal instrument for systematic reviews. To manage the potential for overlapping primary studies across multiple reviews, we will calculate the degree of overlap using citation matrices and the Corrected Covered Area (CCA) method. Data from eligible reviews will be extracted using a piloted, standardized data extraction form. Given the anticipated heterogeneity in interventions, populations, and outcomes, a narrative synthesis approach guided by a six-step reflective thematic analysis will be employed. This qualitative approach will allow for the identification and organization of key themes and patterns across the body of evidence.

Results

The results of this overview will be structured around the creation of an evidence map and thematic synthesis. The evidence map will visually and descriptively categorize the included reviews by the primary vulnerability addressed (e.g.,

refugees, low-income mothers), intervention type (e.g., mentoring, integrated support models), and outcomes measured. The thematic synthesis will identify cross-cutting themes regarding the active ingredients of effective interventions, critical contextual facilitators and barriers, and the theoretical foundations underpinning successful programs. The presentation of results will be explicitly framed by the methodological quality of the contributing reviews.

Discussion and Conclusion

This overview protocol outlines a rigorous plan to synthesize high-level evidence on the efficacy and design of career aspiration interventions for vulnerable women. The discussion will interpret the synthesized findings in the context of intersectional feminist and career construction theories, exploring how interventions navigate the tension between building individual agency and addressing structural inequities. We will explore the implications of the evidence map for targeted versus universal intervention design, and the practical trade-offs between program specificity and scalability. A key strength of this overview is its methodology, which is designed to provide a comprehensive, cross-cutting perspective that transcends the limitations of individual, narrowly-focused systematic reviews. This overview will establish a comprehensive,evidence based framework of the core components and implementation considerations for career interventions targeting women in vulnerable circumstances. By synthesizing evidence from systematic reviews, the findings have the potential to significantly inform evidence-based practice and policy. The final output will serve as a definitive guide for practitioners designing programs and a strategic roadmap for researchers identifying priority areas for future primary studies and more rigorous reviews, ultimately aiming to translate evidence into tangible improvements in economic equity and well-being for marginalized women.

Introduction

Global efforts toward gender equity in the workforce are fundamentally undermined by the persistent and disproportionate barriers faced by women experiencing intersecting vulnerabilities (Smith & Sinkford, 2022; Meshelemiah et al., 2025; Moghanloo, 2024). These vulnerabilities—including but not limited to socioeconomic disadvantage, refugee or migrant status, histories of violence, systemic racial discrimination, and disability—create a complex web of constraints that stifle career aspirations, limit access to education and professional networks, and trap individuals in cycles of economic insecurity (Shafiei, 2024; Sharone, 2024; Thiem & Dasgupta, 2022). Career aspiration, the cognitive and motivational process of envisioning and pursuing a vocational future, is a critical lever for breaking these cycles (Barhate & Dirani, 2022). In response,a heterogeneous landscape of interventions has emerged across disciplines such as vocational psychology, social work, public health, and community development, aiming to foster these aspirations and improve employability outcomes (Ng et al., 2025).

However, the evidence for what constitutes an effective intervention remains fragmented. Existing systematic reviews and meta-analyses often focus on specific sub-populations (e.g., historically marginalized students; Thiem & Dasgupta, 2022), singular intervention types (e.g., career aspirations programs; Barhate & Dirani, 2022), or narrow outcome measures (Dijkers, 2021; Kirvalidze et al., 2023), creating a siloed and incomplete understanding of the field.

This fragmentation presents a significant challenge for stakeholders seeking to design, fund, or scale evidence-based programs (Gebremeskel et al., 2023). This protocol outlines a plan for an overview of systematic reviews that will synthesize this disparate evidence. By systematically identifying and appraising existing reviews, this overview aims to transcend the limitations of individual syntheses to provide a comprehensive,

evidence-based framework of the key components, delivery mechanisms, and contextual prerequisites for effective career aspiration interventions. The resulting framework will be invaluable for clinicians designing intervention programs, policymakers allocating resources, and researchers targeting future primary studies.

Objective

Primary Objective

This overview aims to synthesize evidence from systematic reviews and meta-analysis to identify the active ingredients (core components), operational forms (delivery mechanisms), and contextual conditions (moderating factors) that characterize effective career aspiration and employability interventions for women .experiencing vulnerability

Secondary Objectives

- To compare the reported effectiveness and applicability of different intervention modalities (e.g., one-on-one mentoring vs. group-based training, digital vs. in-person delivery) across various vulnerability profiles.
- To identify the critical contextual factors (e.g., policy environment, availability of wraparound services, cultural considerations) that facilitate or hinder intervention implementation and success.
- To assess the methodological quality and confidence in the findings of the existing body of systematic reviews.
- To highlight gaps in the current evidence base and propose specific directions for future primary .research and more rigorous systematic reviews

Review question

What are the key characteristics—including active ingredients (e.g., mentorship, skill-building, counselling), operational forms (e.g., mode, duration, setting), and contextual conditions (e.g., policy support, cultural appropriateness)—of effective career aspiration interventions for women experiencing intersecting social, economic, or personal vulnerabilities?

Method

Study design

The protocol for this overview has been registered in PROSPERO (CRD420251269873) and will follow the PRIOR (Preferred Reporting Items for Overviews of Reviews) checklist (Gates et al., 2021). We selected an overview of review methodology because it is the most appropriate approach to synthesize high-level evidence from existing systematic reviews, identify broad trends across a heterogeneous body of literature, and provide a comprehensive perspective for practitioners and policymakers. This approach allows for the efficient summarization of evidence while critically assessing the quality and potential biases of the constituent reviews (Gates et al., 2021).

Protocol Amendments and Documentation:

Any amendments made to this protocol after its publication will be systematically documented. This documentation will include the date of the amendment, a description of the change, and the rationale for the modification. All amendments will be updated in the PROSPERO registration record. Furthermore, the final

published overview manuscript will include a section detailing any deviations from the original protocol, ensuring full transparency in the reporting process.

Search strategies

The search strategy is designed to be comprehensive and reproducible. Systematic searches are currently underway in PubMed, Web of Science, CINAHL, PsycINFO, EBSCOhost, Embase, the Cochrane Library, and Scopus. The search targets peer-reviewed systematic reviews and meta-analyses published in English between January 1, 2016, and December 31, 2026. Searches across all databases are being conducted progressively and will continue until the final search date in late 2026 to ensure that the most up-to-date evidence is captured. The 2016–2026 timeframe was selected to include the latest advancements in career aspiration interventions for vulnerable women. The restriction to English-language studies is acknowledged as a limitation. The search strategy adheres to the Peer Review of Electronic Search Strategies (PRESS) guidelines and will be peer-reviewed by an experienced medical librarian. Boolean operators (AND, OR), truncation, and MeSH terms are being applied and adapted for each database.

Example PubMed Search String:

Population (Women & Vulnerability)

("Women"[Mesh] OR "Women"[tiab] OR woman [tiab] OR female*[tiab] OR mother*[tiab]) AND

("Vulnerable Populations"[Mesh] OR "Social Marginalization"[Mesh] OR "Socioeconomic Factors"[Mesh] OR "Poverty"[Mesh] OR "Refugees"[Mesh] OR "Intimate Partner Violence"[Mesh] OR "Domestic Violence"[Mesh] OR "Disabled Persons"[Mesh] OR "Single Parent"[Mesh]) OR

("vulnerable women"[tiab] OR "marginali?ed women"[tiab] OR "disadvantaged women"[tiab] OR "low-income women"[tiab] OR "at-risk women"[tiab] OR "refugee women"[tiab] OR "migrant women"[tiab] OR "abused women"[tiab] OR "survivor* of violence"[tiab] OR "single mother*"[tiab] OR "incarcerated women"[tiab] OR "formerly incarcerated women"[tiab])

AND

Intervention (Career Aspiration & Development)

("Career Choice"[Mesh] OR "Vocational Education"[Mesh] OR "Employment"[Mesh] OR "Mentors"[Mesh] OR "Counseling"[Mesh]) OR

("career aspiration*"[tiab] OR "vocational aspiration*"[tiab] OR "career development"[tiab] OR "career intervention*"[tiab] OR "employability program*"[tiab] OR "job training"[tiab] OR "skills training"[tiab] OR "vocational rehabilitation"[tiab] OR "mentor* program*"[tiab] OR "career counsel*"[tiab] OR "workforce development"[tiab] OR "economic empowerment"[tiab])

AND

Study Design (Systematic Reviews & Meta-Analysis)

("Systematic Review" [Publication Type] OR "Meta-Analysis" [Publication Type] OR "Review Literature as Topic"[Mesh]) OR

("systematic review"[tiab] OR "meta-analysis"[tiab] OR "research synthesis"[tiab] OR "evidence synthesis"[tiab] OR "integrative review"[tiab] OR "overview of reviews"[tiab])

Filters: Date (2016/01/01 to 2026/01/31), English

Study screening

The study selection process will follow the PRISMA guidelines to ensure a systematic and transparent approach (Montemayor & Connolly, 2023). Identified references from all databases will be imported into Covidence systematic review software (Veritas Health Innovation, Melbourne, Australia) for title/abstract and full-text screening. Deduplication will occur in two stages: first, by applying the default deduplication settings within Covidence, which automatically remove exact duplicates based on title, author, and year. Subsequently, a secondary, manual check will be performed to identify and remove any remaining near-duplicates or records missed by the automated process.

Screening will be conducted by two independent reviewers in two consecutive phases:

1. Title and Abstract Screening: Reviewers will assess all unique records against the eligibility criteria using a pre-piloted screening form in Covidence.
2. Full-Text Screening: The full texts of all records deemed potentially eligible in the first phase will be retrieved and assessed for final inclusion using a standardized full-text screening form.

At both stages, discrepancies between reviewers will be resolved through discussion. If consensus cannot be reached, a third senior reviewer will arbitrate. The arbitration process will involve the third reviewer independently examining the disputed item along with the documented reasons for disagreement, after which their decision will be final.

All project configurations within Covidence—including the custom-built eligibility forms, data extraction template, and reason for exclusion labels—will be archived upon project completion and made available upon reasonable request to ensure transparency and reproducibility. The selection process will be documented in a PRISMA flow diagram.

Selection process

Two independent reviewers will screen titles/abstracts and assess full-text eligibility using predefined criteria. A third reviewer will arbitrate unresolved disagreements. Inter-rater agreement will be measured using Cohen's kappa (κ) statistic at each screening stage: after title/abstract screening and again after full-text assessment. A kappa value of ≥ 0.7 will be considered indicative of substantial agreement. If the kappa value falls below this threshold at either stage, reviewers will discuss the discrepancies, refine the screening criteria if necessary, and re-calibrate their approach before proceeding.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria: Studies will be included if they meet the following criteria:

(a) Study Design: Be a systematic review and meta-analysis) with or without quantitative synthesis) published in a peer-reviewed journal.

(b) Population: Focus primarily on women (aged+18) experiencing one or more defined vulnerabilities (e.g., economic disadvantage, refugee/asylum status, history of gender-based violence, racial/ethnic marginalization, low educational attainment, involvement with the justice system).

(c) Intervention: Evaluate one or more structured interventions, programs, or services where a primary or secondary aim is to improve career aspirations, career decision-making self-efficacy, vocational skills, employability, job placement, or career advancement.

(d) Publication Details: Be published in English between January 1, 2016, and 2026 .

In-Scope Intervention Types (Core Domains):

- Skills and Training: Job skills training, vocational education programs, digital literacy training, resume/ interview workshops.
- Psychosocial Support: Career counseling, mentoring programs, peer support groups, coaching focused on self-efficacy and aspiration.
- Integrated and Wraparound Services: Interventions combining vocational support with other services (e.g., childcare, housing assistance, legal aid, mental health support).
- Advocacy and System Navigation: Programs designed to navigate institutional barriers, provide employer advocacy, or facilitate access to education/training.

Exclusion Criteria: Studies will be excluded if they:

(a) Are primary research studies, scoping reviews, narrative reviews, dissertations/theses, editorials, commentaries, or conference abstracts.

(b) Focus on populations where vulnerability is not a central focus (e.g., the general population of university students without a specified vulnerability) or where the female experience cannot be disaggregated.

(c) Evaluate interventions that target only academic performance, general mental health, or substance use without a clear and measured link to career or vocational outcomes.

(d) Protocols for systematic reviews that have not yet reported results.

e) Examine interventions solely for men or mixed-gender groups where outcomes for women are not reported) .separately and the intervention is not designed for women's specific contexts

Quality Evaluation

The methodological quality (i.e., confidence in the results) of each included systematic review will be critically appraised by two independent reviewers using the AMSTAR-2 (A MeaSurement Tool to Assess Systematic Reviews – 2; Shea et al., 2017) tool. This validated instrument assesses key domains such as the clarity of the research question, adequacy of the search strategy, appropriateness of study selection and data extraction, and the rigor of synthesis methods. Reviews will be rated overall as having High, Moderate, Low, or Critically Low confidence. Any review rated as 'critically low' will be excluded from the primary narrative synthesis and evidence mapping; however, its existence and main conclusions may be noted in the discussion of limitations.

Note: Scoping reviews will be identified but will be excluded from the primary synthesis, as the focus of this overview is on evidence of effectiveness synthesized in systematic reviews and meta-analysis. Therefore, they will not undergo AMSTAR-2 appraisal.

Risk of Bias in Primary Studies

Regarding the risk of bias (RoB) in the primary studies contained within the included reviews, we will extract and summarize the RoB assessments as reported by the authors of each systematic review. We will not conduct a re-appraisal of the primary studies. Data extracted will include the specific RoB tool used by the review authors (e.g., Cochrane RoB tool, ROBINS-I) and a summary of their findings on the overall RoB of the included primary evidence. This approach allows us to characterize the methodological quality of the underlying evidence base as interpreted by the original reviewers, which is a standard and efficient methodology for overviews of reviews.

Data Extraction

Data from all eligible reviews will be extracted independently by two reviewers using a pre-piloted, standardized form in Covidence. The form will capture:

- Review Characteristics: Authors, year, objectives, number, and design of primary studies included.
- Population: Specific vulnerability profile(s), age range, geographical context.
- Intervention: Type, core components, delivery mode, duration, and theoretical framework.
- Comparator: Description of control or comparison conditions.
- Outcomes: Primary and secondary outcomes related to career aspirations and employability, along with reported effect measures and key findings.
- Quality/RoB: AMSTAR-2 rating and a summary of the reported risk of bias in primary studies.
- Authors' Conclusions and Identified Gaps.

Discrepancies in extraction or appraisal will be resolved through discussion or, if necessary, arbitration by a third reviewer.

Certainty of the Evidence

For key findings derived from systematic reviews and meta-analysis, the certainty (or confidence) of the evidence will be assessed using the Grading of Recommendations, Assessment, Development, and Evaluations (GRADE; Guyatt et al., 2011) framework. Two reviewers will independently judge the certainty for each critical outcome (e.g., employment status, housing stability) across five domains: risk of bias, inconsistency, indirectness, imprecision, and publication bias. The certainty will be rated as high, moderate, low, or very low. Findings from scoping reviews will not be formally assessed using GRADE due to their different purpose and methodology, but their contributions to mapping the evidence landscape will be narratively described.

Assessment of Primary Study Overlap

To gauge the degree of repetition in the evidence base, the overlap of primary studies across the included reviews will be quantified using citation matrices and the corrected covered area (CCA) method (Kirvalidze et al., 2023). To manage this overlap during the narrative synthesis, we will adopt the following strategy: If multiple reviews report on the same primary study for a specific finding, we will prioritize the evidence from the review with the highest AMSTAR-2 rating. In cases of similar quality, the most recent or most comprehensive review will be cited. This approach ensures that the same primary study does not disproportionately influence the synthesized findings. The degree of overlap (CCA value) will be reported transparently and its potential impact on the conclusions will be discussed.

As an overview of reviews, we will assess and report on the following biases:

- Across Reviews: We will evaluate whether the included systematic reviews themselves assessed publication bias in their primary studies (e.g., using funnel plots or statistical tests).
  The methods and results of these assessments will be extracted and narratively summarized.
- At the Overview Level: We will not conduct a new publication bias assessment on the primary studies. However, we will critically discuss the potential for publication bias and selective reporting within the body of evidence as a limitation, especially if a majority of the included reviews note such concerns or if the overall evidence base appears skewed.

Data Management and Reproducibility

To ensure transparency and reproducibility, we will implement the following data management plan:

- All search strategies for each database will be saved and provided as supplementary material.
- The piloted data extraction form (Supplementary File 1) will be made available.
- The project configuration in Covidence, including screening decisions and reasons for exclusion, will be archived upon project completion and made available upon reasonable request.
- A PRISMA-P flow diagram will document the study selection process.
- The final dataset generated from the data extraction (e.g., an Excel spreadsheet) will be made available in a public repository (e.g., Figshare) upon publication of the overview.

Component Coding and Data Extraction Framework

To ensure consistent and comprehensive data extraction, we will develop a standardized coding framework informed by the Template for Intervention Description and Replication (TIDieR; Dijkers, 2021) checklist, adapted for complex psychosocial and vocational interventions. Two reviewers will independently extract and code the following components from each included systematic review using a pre-piloted form in Covidence or a similar data management tool checklist. The following components will be systematically extracted and coded from each included review:

- Intervention Characteristics
- Delivery Format
- Provider Details
- Contextual Factors
- Outcome Measures

Strategy for Data Analysis

Due to the broad and multifaceted nature of our review question, which seeks to explore a wide range of characteristics (components, delivery, context) rather than aggregate a single quantitative effect estimate, a narrative synthesis approach guided by a six-step reflective thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2023) will be employed. This qualitative approach is particularly suited to our aim because it allows for the flexible and inductive identification of themes across a heterogeneous body of literature. The narrative synthesis approach offers a holistic perspective on the evidence gathered from various methodologies by combining and detailing study outcomes instead of depending purely on statistical summaries. Subgroup analysis will explore heterogeneity by intervention type. Sensitivity analysis will exclude reviews with high overlap or critically low AMSTAR-2 ratings.

The six-step reflective thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) will be operationalized as follows:

• Familiarization: All reviewers will read a subset of the included reviews to immerse themselves in the data.

• Generating Initial Codes: Two reviewers will independently code the extracted data (e.g., authors' conclusions, key findings) from all included reviews using a preliminary coding framework based on the TIDieR checklist and research questions. This process will be conducted using MAXQDA software.

• Searching for Themes: The two reviewers will meet to compare their initial codes, resolve discrepancies through discussion, and collate codes into potential themes and sub-themes. Inter-coder reliability for the initial coding will be calculated using Cohen's Kappa (κ), with a target of $\kappa \geq 0.7$ indicating substantial agreement.

• Reviewing Themes: The preliminary thematic map will be reviewed and refined by the entire research team against the entire coded dataset to ensure coherence and accuracy.

• Defining and Naming Themes: Each theme will be clearly defined, and a concise name will be established to capture its essence.

• Producing the Report: The final analysis will be woven into the narrative of the results section, as described above.

Thematic analysis will be conducted using MAXQDA software. Findings will be structured around the key characteristics identified. Heterogeneity will be explored through subgroup analysis and discussed narratively. A sensitivity analysis will be conducted by excluding reviews with critically low AMSTAR-2 ratings to test the robustness of the findings. The PRIOR checklist will guide the reporting of results.

Project Timeline

The projected timeline for the completion of this overview is outlined in Table 1. Key milestones include the final search, completion of screening and data extraction, and the anticipated submission of the final manuscript.

Table 1. Project Timeline

Phase / Task	Start Date	End Date	Key Deliverables
Finalization of Protocol	15 January 2025	15 January 2025	Publication of study protocol
Peer Review of Search Strategy	15 January 2025	15 January 2025	Finalized, peer-reviewed search strings
Database Searches	February 2026	February 2026	Complete search results from all databases
Screening (Title/Abstract)	February 2026	March 2026	List of potentially eligible full-text reviews
Screening (Full-Text)	March 2026	March 2026	Final list of included reviews
Data Extraction	April 2026	April 2026	Completed data extraction forms
Quality Assessment (AMSTAR-2/PRISMA-ScR)	May 2026	May 2026	Quality ratings for all included reviews
Thematic Analysis & Synthesis	July 2026	July 2026	Draft synthesis report and thematic framework
GRADE Assessment (for key outcomes)	August 2026	August 2026	Certainty of evidence ratings
Manuscript Drafting	August 2026	October 2026	Complete draft of the overview manuscript
Internal Review & Revision	November 2026	November 2026	Revised manuscript
Submission to Journal	December 2026	31December 2026	Submission of the final manuscript

Conditions for Meta-Analysis

A quantitative meta-analysis of review-level data is not the primary aim of this overview. However, if we identify a sufficient number (e.g., ≥ 3) of methodologically homogeneous systematic reviews (e.g., similar interventions, outcomes, and populations) that report compatible quantitative data (e.g., odds ratios, standardized mean differences) and the corrected covered area (CCA) indicates very low overlap (<5%) among primary studies, we will consider conducting a meta-analysis of the meta-analysis (a tertiary meta-analysis) for that specific outcome. The feasibility of this will be assessed post-hoc. If a meta-analysis is performed, its results

will be integrated with the narrative thematic synthesis to provide a comprehensive evidence picture. We will use a joint display or concordance matrix to explicitly map the quantitative findings from the meta-analysis against the identified qualitative themes. This will allow us to examine areas of convergence (where statistical results and thematic findings reinforce each other), complementarity (where they provide different, non-conflicting insights), and dissonance (where apparent contradictions arise, requiring further interpretation).

Ethical Statements

As an overview of systematic reviews, this study does not involve the collection of new primary data from human or animal subjects. Therefore, it does not require ethical approval from an institutional review board. The overview will synthesize and analyze findings from previously published and ethically approved systematic reviews, which themselves are based on primary studies that have obtained the necessary ethical clearances. Our research adheres to the highest standards of academic integrity in the synthesis and reporting .of existing evidence

Summary of the project conceptual framework

.(is divided into five phases (Fig 1 The research protocol flowchart

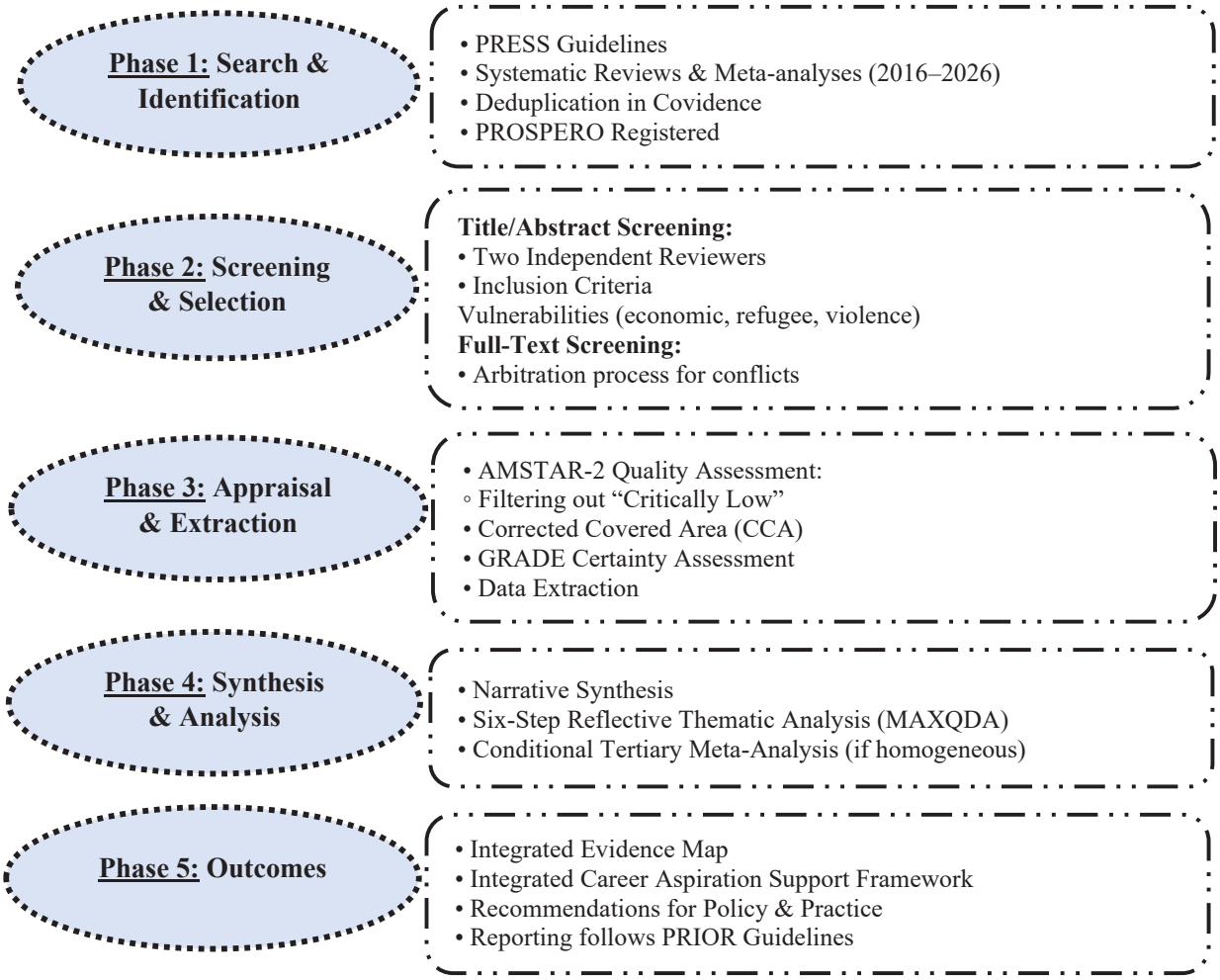


Fig1 . Research protocol flowchart

Results

The results of this overview will be structured to address the primary and secondary objectives. Following the synthesis process, findings will be presented as an integrated evidence map and a thematic narrative.

Study Selection and Characteristics

The study selection process will be summarized in a PRISMA flow diagram, detailing the number of records identified, screened, assessed for eligibility, and included. A summary table will present the characteristics of the included systematic reviews, including their AMSTAR-2 ratings, the specific vulnerabilities and populations examined, the types of interventions reviewed, and the primary outcomes measured.

Primary Objective: A Framework of Effective Intervention Characteristics

The findings from the thematic synthesis will be organized into core themes that constitute an evidence-based framework for effective career aspiration interventions. This framework will detail the active ingredients, operational forms, and contextual conditions necessary for success. For instance, a primary theme anticipated is "Integrated Support Models," which would synthesize evidence on the critical importance of combining vocational skill-building (an active ingredient) with wraparound services like childcare or counseling (a contextual enabler), delivered through a trusted, ongoing relationship with a mentor or coach (an operational form).

Secondary Objective 1: Comparison of Intervention Modalities

Results related to the comparative applicability and effectiveness of different delivery modalities will be presented. This will narratively summarize evidence on how outcomes may differ between, for example, group-based training programs (which may foster peer support and reduce isolation) versus one-on-one mentoring (which may allow for deeper personalization). The synthesis will highlight which modalities appear most suitable for different vulnerability profiles, such as digital platforms for geographically isolated women versus in-person, community-based programs for building local networks.

Secondary Objective 2: Critical Contextual Factors

The synthesized evidence on the contextual factors that facilitate or hinder intervention success will be detailed. This will likely include factors such as:

- *Structural Enablers:* The availability of supportive policies (e.g., childcare subsidies, recognized credentialing for migrants) and organizational commitment.
- *Cultural and Safety Considerations:* The necessity of trauma-informed approaches and cultural adaptation for specific groups, such as refugees or survivors of violence.
- *Partnership Ecosystems:* The role of cross-sector collaboration with employers, educational institutions, and social services.

Secondary Objective 3: Quality of the Evidence and Identified Gaps

This section will present two key outputs:

1. *Methodological Quality and Confidence:* A summary of the AMSTAR-2 ratings and GRADE assessments, providing a clear statement on the overall confidence in the synthesized evidence. This will indicate whether the current high-level evidence is robust or preliminary.
2. *Evidence Gaps and Future Directions:* Based on the evidence map and synthesis, specific gaps will be highlighted. These may include a lack of reviews for certain vulnerable populations (e.g., women with disabilities), a paucity of evidence on long-term sustainability and economic outcomes, or a need for more rigorous, high-quality systematic reviews in particular domains.

Discussion

This discussion will interpret the synthesized findings within the broader contexts of career development theory, intersectional feminism, and social policy. The primary contribution of this overview is the Integrated Career Aspiration Support Framework derived from the thematic synthesis. This framework posits that effective interventions for vulnerable women are not singular activities but orchestrated ecosystems that simultaneously address internal agency and external barriers. The core finding that psychosocial scaffolding is inseparable from practical skill-building challenges siloed program design and underscores the need for theories of change that integrate psychological and structural components, such as an expanded Social Cognitive Career Theory that explicitly accounts for systemic inequality.

The analysis of contextual factors reveals a critical insight: the well-designed intervention will fail without an enabling infrastructure. The identified necessity for childcare, safe housing, transportation, and employer partnerships is not merely logistical but foundational to equitable access. This has direct implications for policymakers and funders, suggesting that investments in standalone "job training" programs are likely inefficient unless coupled with investments in the social determinants of employability. Furthermore, the differential effectiveness of modalities across populations underscores the principle that vulnerability is not monolithic. A one-size-fits-all approach is contraindicated by the evidence; programs for refugees must prioritize credential recognition and social integration, while those for survivors of violence must be built on a trauma-informed foundation.

We must also critically engage with the limitations of the evidence base, as revealed by our quality assessments. The preponderance of reviews rated as low or moderate confidence on AMSTAR-2 indicates that many existing syntheses have methodological weaknesses, such as inadequate search strategies or a lack of bias assessment. The frequent omission of long-term economic outcomes (e.g., wage progression, career mobility) points to a short-termism in the field. Additionally, the overview's own limitation—the exclusion of non-English literature—may have omitted valuable insights from low- and middle-income countries, potentially narrowing the applicability of our framework. The corrected covered area (CCA) analysis will be discussed, noting how substantial overlap among primary studies across reviews may give a false impression of a large evidence base when it is concentrated on a smaller set of studies.

Conclusion

This overview protocol establishes a rigorous pathway to synthesize a fragmented body of evidence into a coherent, actionable framework. The forthcoming overview will provide the first high-level map of effective career aspiration interventions for women experiencing vulnerability, moving beyond isolated findings to identify cross-cutting principles. The expected Integrated Career Aspiration Support Framework will offer a vital tool for practitioners to design holistic programs and for policymakers to allocate resources toward the most impactful, multi-component strategies.

Ultimately, this work aims to translate scattered evidence into a force for economic equity. By clarifying what works, for whom, and under what conditions, it seeks to empower stakeholders to move from well-intentioned but piecemeal projects toward systemic, evidence-informed solutions. The final overview will not only summarize the current state of knowledge but will also chart a clear research agenda, calling for more methodologically rigorous reviews, longitudinal studies on economic outcomes, and focused research

on underrepresented populations. In doing so, it contributes to the larger goal of transforming career aspiration from a privileged possibility into a tangible reality for all women.

Competing interests

All authors declare that there are no competing interests, financial or otherwise, that could have influenced the design, conduct, or reporting of this overview.

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Patient and public involvement

None in the design of this protocol.

Ethics and dissemination

This study will neither involve human nor animal subjects and does not require ethics approval. Results will be disseminated to relevant groups in a peer-reviewed format.

Authors' Contributions

All authors conceived the research question and designed the review protocol. The second author provided guidance for the evaluation of psychosocial rehabilitation interventions in people with substance-related disorders. The first authors performed the literature search, tested, and revised the electronic search strategy. The second authors designed the statistical analysis plan. All authors contributed equally to the writing and revision of the manuscript. All authors made substantial contributions to the conception and design of the paper, piloted the inclusion criteria, and provided direction to the data extraction and analysis. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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(Supplementary File 1):

Supplementary File 1: Data Extraction Form for the Overview of Reviews

Review Identification

- Review ID:
- First Author:
- Year of Publication:
- Review Title:
- DOI/PMID:

1. Review Characteristics

- Review Type:
    - Systematic Review (without meta-analysis)
    - Systematic Review & Meta-Analysis

- Stated Objective(s) of the Review:
    - *(Copy/paste or paraphrase)*
- Number of Included Primary Studies:
- Databases Searched:
- Date Range of Primary Study Search:
- Reported Limitations (as per review authors):

2. Participant / Population Characteristics

- Primary Population: Adult women (18+) experiencing vulnerability.
- Primary Vulnerability Category(ies):
    - Socioeconomic disadvantage / Low-income
    - Refugee / Asylum Seeker / Migrant Status
    - History of Gender-Based Violence (e.g., domestic violence, trafficking)
    - Racial/Ethnic Marginalization
    - Disability
    - Involvement with the Justice System
    - Single Motherhood (as a vulnerability factor)
    - Other (specify): _____
- Geographic Context of Primary Studies:
    - High-Income Countries
    - Low- and Middle-Income Countries
    - Mixed / Global
- Notable Co-occurring Challenges Mentioned:
    - Mental Health Conditions
    - Homelessness / Housing Instability
    - Low Educational Attainment
    - None Specified / Not a focus

3. Intervention Characteristics (Based on TIDieR Framework)

- Intervention Domain(s): *(Select all that apply from the review's focus)*
    - Skills & Training (e.g., vocational, digital literacy)
    - Psychosocial Support (e.g., mentoring, counselling, peer support)
    - Integrated / Wraparound Services (e.g., combines vocational + childcare/housing)
    - Advocacy & System Navigation
- Core Active Ingredients: *(List key components described)*

  1.

  2.

  3.
- Theoretical Framework / Logic Model Mentioned: *(e.g., Social Cognitive Career Theory)*
- Delivery Format:
    - In-person
    - Digital / Remote

    - Hybrid
- Primary Setting:
    - Community-based organization
    - Educational Institution
    - Workplace / Employer-based
    - Online Platform
    - Integrated Service Hub
- Intervention Dosage: *(Duration, frequency, intensity - e.g., “12-week program, 2 sessions/week”)*
- Provider Background:
    - Professional (e.g., career counselor, social worker)
    - Peer Specialist / Mentor with lived experience
    - Volunteer
    - Mixed / Not Specified

4. Comparatr
    - Description of Comparison / Control Group: *(e.g., Treatment as Usual, waitlist, alternative intervention)*
5. Outcomes & ffectiveness
    - Primary Career/Employability Outcomes Measured: *(e.g., career decision-making self-efficacy, employment status, wage increase)*
        - 1.
        - 2.
    - Secondary Outcomes Measured: *(e.g., educational enrollment, psychological wellbeing, economic self-sufficiency)*
    - Authors’ Overall Conclusion on Effectiveness:
        - Largely Effective
        - Mixed / Inconclusive Evidence
        - Largely Ineffective
        - Not Reported
    - Basis of Conclusion:
        - Quantitative Synthesis (Meta-analysis)
        - Narrative Synthesis
    - Key Findings Supporting Conclusion: *(Briefly summarize main results)*
6. Methodological Quality & Risk of Bias
    - AMSTAR-2 Rating: *(Assessed by this overview team)*
        - High
        - Moderate
        - Low
        - Critically Low
    - Risk of Bias in Primary Studies: *(As reported by the review authors)*
        - Tool used: _____
        - Summary of authors’ RoB assessment: _____

7. Overlap & Miscellaneous

- Notes on Primary Study Overlap: *(Note if this review clearly duplicates primary studies from another included review)*
- Identified Gaps / Future Research Directions: *(As noted by the review authors)*
- Additional Reviewer Notes: