

Marc White¹, Shannon Wagner², Izabela Schultz³, Rick Iverson^{4†}, Vernita Hsu⁵, Lisa McGuire⁶, Werner Schulz⁷, ¹Canadian Institute for the Relief of Pain and Disability/ Department of Family Practice, UBC, ²School of Health Sciences, University of Northern British Columbia, ³Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education, UBC, ⁴Beedie School of Business, Simon Fraser University, ⁵BC Construction Safety Alliance, ⁶The FIOSA-MIOSA Safety Alliance of BC, ⁷Healthcare Benefit Trust. †This poster is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Rick Iverson who passed away suddenly in May 2012.

Introduction

A common challenge facing stakeholders is the identification of relevant high quality research, and its translation into useful information to inform policy, training, and practice.

Academic and community stakeholders were engaged to participate in the identification, translation and implementation of credible, relevant knowledge to support best practices in disability prevention and management.

Purpose

As part of a collaboration between stakeholders and academics, we conducted a stakeholder-centred systematic review of systematic reviews to identify disability risk and protective factors associated with work-related and chronic disease health conditions impacting work-related absences and disability durations.

Methods

Search Strategy: Identify keywords and pilot test search strategies.

Databases searched: Medline, Embase, CINHAL, The Cochrane Library, PsycINFO, BusinessSourceComplete, and ABI/Inform.

Years: 2000 to 2011.

Systematic review inclusion criteria: Quantitative and qualitative meta-analyses, non-meta-analytic systematic reviews of both qualitative and quantitative literature for work-focused populations.

Inclusion assessment: Two or more independent reviewers analyzed literature in sequence of titles only, titles and abstracts, and full articles.

Final review: Comprehensive review and methodological screening of selected articles

Results

- 2,467 unique records were identified
- 142 full text articles underwent comprehensive review
- 37 full text systematic reviews met eligibility criteria and were included
- Review reported on non-modifiable factors that should be considered as having strong and/or moderate level evidence for prediction of an increased risk of disability across a variety of health conditions

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of Search Strategy

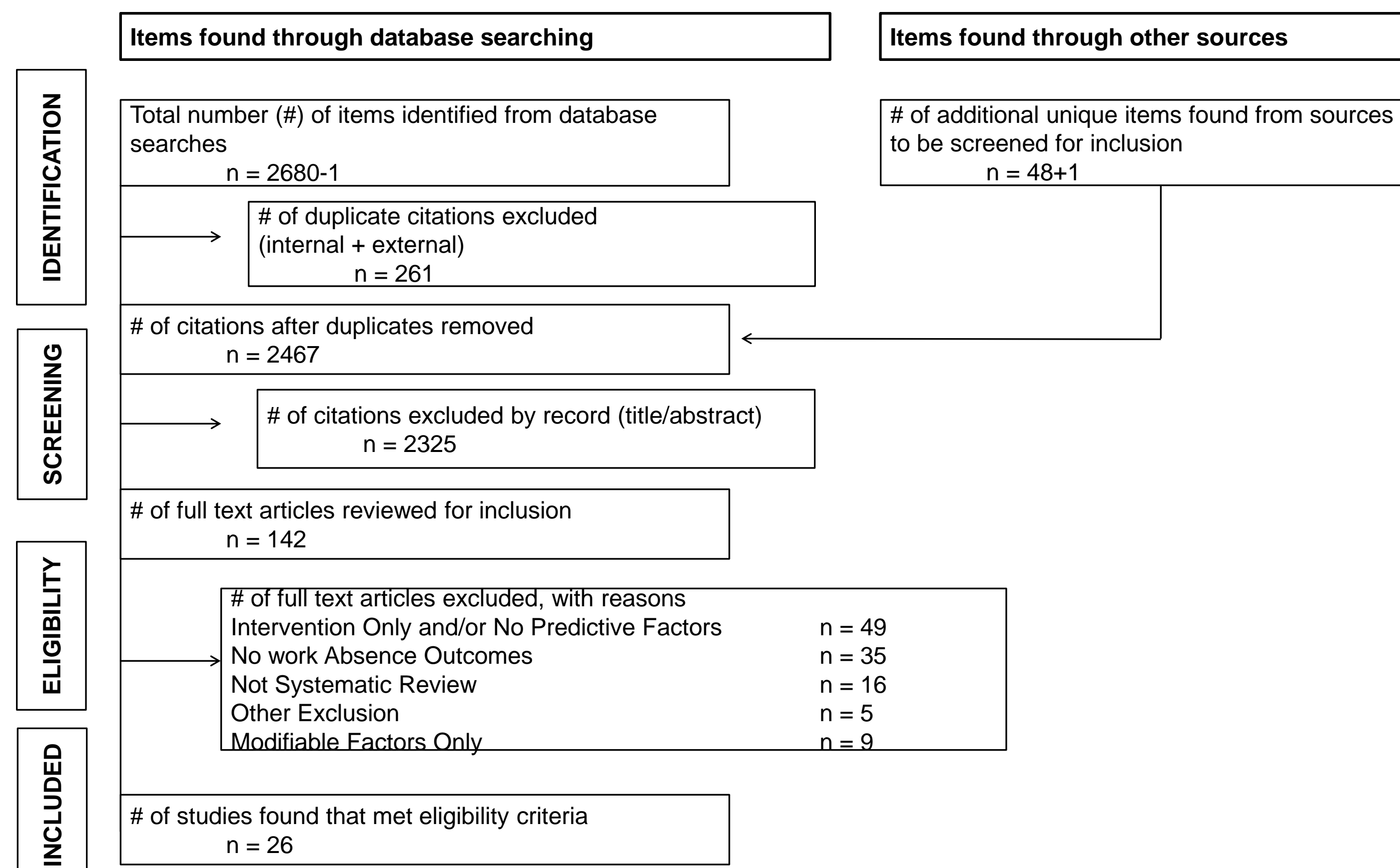


Table 1. Non-modifiable workplace and worker risk factors associated with work absence across health conditions

• Non-modifiable workplace factors found to have a moderate or strong evidence included:

• Lower occupational status

• Existence of a worker's compensation claim

• Non-modifiable worker factors found to have moderate or strong evidence included:

• Older age

• Overweight status

• Poor personal functioning

• Increased emotional distress

• Increased psychological symptoms

• Non-married status

• Increased clinical/complicating factors

• Female gender*

• Decreased physical functioning

• Presence of respiratory conditions

* In cases of rheumatoid arthritis and low back pain

Limitations

Systematic reviews are limited by availability of high quality primary studies, lack of consistency of methodological screening and reporting, and variability of outcome measures used.

Identification and translation of keywords and MESH terms across different databases was an iterative process; it is possible that some systematic reviews were missed.

Given resources available and the utilization of stakeholders in the process, the search strategy was limited to English.

Future Research

A synthesis focused on intervention studies, addressing identified risk and protective factors, should be conducted to inform best practices in preventing unnecessary disability.

To improve the quantity and quality of primary studies, establishment and promotion of standard functional outcome measures is needed.

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