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A systematic review of interventions to improve the health factors and behaviors associated with the cardiovascular health of prisoners during incarceration

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Abstract

Background: Prisoners are disproportionately affected by cardiovascular disease and its risk factors. However, primary prevention of cardiovascular disease in correctional settings has been widely neglected and there is little information on interventions to improve the cardiovascular health of prisoners while incarcerated.

Objective: To systematically review published literature to identify interventions to improve the health factors or behaviors of the cardiovascular health of prisoners during incarceration.

Methods: Selected databases were searched using terms related to prisoners and cardiovascular disease. Studies were included if they had prisoners as participants and measured outcomes of cardiovascular health. Narrative synthesis was used to organize the evidence from the studies.

Results: Twelve papers detailing 11 studies were identified. Most of the studies involved only males. Interventions were classified into four types: structured physical activity; nutrition; mixed with physical activity and education sessions; and smoking cessation. Most studies measured short-term outcomes relating to cardiovascular health such as changes in blood pressure and weight. Only four studies were of high quality. Structured physical activity interventions, nutrition interventions and smoking cessation interventions delivered in a group setting had significant effects on at least one measured outcome. The effect of mixed interventions could not be determined.

Conclusion: Structured physical activity interventions, nutrition interventions and smoking cessation interventions delivered in a group setting can improve health factors or behaviors of the cardiovascular health of prisoners during incarceration. More high-quality research is needed to increase the evidence base on the effectiveness of these interventions in the correctional setting.

Introduction

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the leading cause of death worldwide and it accounted for approximately 17.5 million deaths in 2012.¹ The most common modifiable risk factors of CVD, physical inactivity, unhealthy diet, tobacco use and excessive alcohol use, are also common risk factors of other non-communicable diseases (NCDs).² These risk factors disproportionately affect certain groups such as women, ethnic minorities and prisoners.³

Prisoners tend to have poorer health than the general population⁴ and there is a higher prevalence of the common modifiable risk factors of CVD in this population compared to the general population.^{5,6} This is due to the high percentage of prisoners being involved in high risk behaviors, for example, 64% to 92% of prisoners smoke.⁵ In some countries, this represents three times the prevalence of smoking in the general population.⁷ Incarceration can also significantly increase prisoners' risk of hypertension⁸ and CVD has shown to be a major cause of death in prisoners both in and out of prison.⁹⁻¹¹

The correctional environment can be very stressful and as a result, many prisoners suffer from mental health issues such as anxiety and depression which have been associated with CVD.⁶ Thus those in positions of authority have a responsibility to provide environments which promote positive prisoner health and wellbeing. Prisoner health is of public health importance as most prisoners will eventually be released back into the community, carrying with them their existing health problems which can increase the burden on public health resources.¹²

1 CVD mortality and morbidity can be reduced by implementing interventions designed
2 to target its modifiable risk factors.² Several guidelines exist which provide evidence-
3 based recommendations to reduce these factors.¹³⁻¹⁵ Behavior change interventions
4 in particular have been recommended in reducing these risk factors.¹⁶ Interventions
5 which involved physician advice, individual counseling, teaching behavioral skills and
6 those that were tailored to the individual's needs have shown to be effective in
7 targeting these risk factors.^{17,18} Unfortunately such interventions have been more
8 geared towards the public domain from which prisons are usually excluded.

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10 Although CVD and its risk factors are major health problems for prisoners, primary
11 prevention and treatment for NCDs including CVD has largely been neglected.⁵ This
12 is possibly due to a perception that, because the majority of prisoners are young,
13 CVD may not be an issue.¹² There is a need to challenge such perceptions and to
14 implement interventions to promote the cardiovascular health for prisoners.
15 Encouraging prisoners to change their health behaviors while incarcerated could
16 potentially improve their cardiovascular and general health during incarceration,^{19,20}
17 and help improve the health of those who are eventually released into the
18 community.

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20 One recent systematic review identified 95 randomized controlled trials (RCTs) that
21 evaluated interventions to improve the health of prisoners but only two of these
22 focused specifically on cardiovascular health.²¹ The authors looked at RCTs²¹ but
23 studies with this design can be difficult to conduct in a prison setting due to several
24 factors including randomization, anonymity and blinding. This current systematic
25 review was therefore conducted to identify interventions used to improve health

factors or behaviors of the cardiovascular health of prisoners during incarceration and to assess their effectiveness.

Methods

Search strategy and inclusion criteria

The search strategy followed PRISMA guidelines²² to identify all relevant articles. An electronic search for articles was performed in CINAHL, MEDLINE via OVID, PubMed, PsychINFO and the Knowledge Network from inception to May 2016. The following terms were used in individual searches: 'prisoners', 'offenders', 'exercise', 'training', nutrition', 'diet', 'smoking cessation', 'cardiovascular', 'health promotion', and 'wellness'. Each individual search was then combined to identify articles. An example of a search using CINHALL is given in Table 1.

The inclusion criteria for this review were peer-reviewed studies that were based in a correctional setting and had participants who were current prisoners. In this review the term 'prisoners' refers to people incarcerated in prisons, jails and other correctional institutions, including inmates and offenders.

As the nature of correctional regimes makes it difficult to randomize prisoners, studies of differing designs (including RCTs) were included to not eliminate any potentially important studies. Studies had to observe outcomes of at least one of the following health factors and behaviors related to cardiovascular health as outlined by the American Heart Association²³: blood pressure; cholesterol levels; blood glucose levels; physical activity; diet; weight and smoking status. Studies were excluded if they only presented baseline results or if they measured outcomes after participants

1 were released from prison as this review looked at the effect on prisoners while are
2 incarcerated.
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4 A full list of articles was obtained and then screened for duplicates. Abstracts were
5 reviewed to identify the articles according to the inclusion criteria. Reference lists of
6 relevant articles were searched by hand to identify any appropriate studies that could
7 potentially be included in the review. The search strategy and selected full-text
8 articles were reviewed and verified by another researcher (ED). Any discrepancies
9 were discussed. The search strategy is summarized in Figure 1.
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20 *Narrative synthesis*

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23 Narrative synthesis was used to organize the evidence from the studies. This
24 approach is used when studies are too methodologically diverse to be combined in a
25 meta-analysis.²⁴ Data were extracted from the studies using a data extraction
26 template designed for use in the review. The studies were then grouped according to
27 the type of intervention they described, and were presented in tabular form. For all
28 studies, data were extracted on study design, sample size, sample characteristics,
29 type of intervention, intervention duration and outcomes of the study.
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41 *Quality assessment*

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45 The quality of the studies was assessed using the Quality Assessment Tool for
46 Quantitative Studies developed by the Effective Public Health Practice Project
47 (EPHPP).²⁵ A detailed definition of the tool is provided to clarify the assessment
48 process.²⁶ The EPHPP tool was selected above other tools such as the Cochrane
49 Collaboration Risk of Bias Tool (CCRB) as it allows for the assessment of range of
50 study designs, and therefore does not limit the number of studies that can be
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1 included in the review based on design.²⁷ All articles were independently assessed
2 by two researchers (AM and ED) and any discrepancies were discussed and
3 resolved.
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8 **Results**

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10 In total, 833 articles were retrieved, and after removing duplicates, having screened
11 abstracts and full-texts, 12 articles detailing 11 studies were included in this review.
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13 The results from one study were published in two papers.^{28,29} The studies were all
14 carried out in high-income countries: four in the U.S.A.,²⁸⁻³² two in Australia,^{33,34} two
15 in Spain,^{35,36} and one each in Italy,³⁷ Belgium,³⁸ and Canada.³⁹ Eight studies
16 included only males,^{30-34,36-38} two included only females^{28,29,39} and one included both
17 males and females.³⁵
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29 *Structured physical activity interventions*

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31 Four studies evaluated the effect of supervised structured physical activity
32 interventions (Table 2).^{30,31,36,37} Changes in different clinical factors such as blood
33 pressure and cholesterol levels, and changes in physical fitness factors such as
34 muscular endurance and strength were measured. Two studies compared a single
35 intervention group which participated in an exercise program to a control group.^{30,36}
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37 One study observed significant positive effects on the physical fitness of prisoners,³⁰
38 while the other study did not observe any significant effects.³⁶ Two studies compared
39 two or more intervention groups to a control group.^{31,37} One study which evaluated
40 two different training protocols found that cardiovascular and resistance training was
41 more effective in improving the physical fitness of prisoners compared to high
42 intensity strength training.³⁷ The other study compared exercise frequency and found
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that more frequent exercise had more positive effects on body composition compared to less frequent exercise.³¹

Nutrition interventions

Three studies evaluated the effect of nutrition interventions (Table 3).^{32,35,38} Two studies measured health-related outcomes such as BMI, abdominal perimeter, blood pressure and cholesterol levels.^{35,38} Both studies evaluated interventions in which the diet of prisoners were modified. One changed the entire diet of prisoners according to their health needs,³⁵ while the other supplied a diet enhanced with fatty acids.³⁸ The study that changed entire diets observed significant positive effects on the body composition of intervention participants,³⁵ while the other study which used enhanced fatty acid supplementation only observed significant positive effects on diastolic blood pressure and high density lipoproteins in prisoners who smoked.³⁸ The third study evaluated the impact of education and behavioral workshops on the nutrition practices of prisoners.³² This study found that nutrition education and reinforcement of positive healthy nutrition habits had a significantly positive effect on prisoners' nutrition practices.

Mixed interventions

Two studies evaluated mixed interventions that combined physical activity and education sessions (Table 4).^{34,39} Both studies used a prisoner or prisoners to lead part or all of the intervention. One study evaluated the effect of supervised physical activity combined with health education classes on the health of prisoners with chronic illness or risk factors for a chronic illness.³⁴ Changes in anthropometric and clinical variables were measured including weight, blood pressure and blood glucose

1 levels. Significant positive effects were only observed for resting heart rate and
2 endurance.
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5 The other study evaluated the effect of a nutrition and fitness program on the health
6 and wellbeing of female prisoners.³⁹ The program incorporated the use of behavior
7 change techniques such as self-monitoring of eating behavior and goal-setting to
8 help prisoners track their personal fitness progress.³⁹ Changes in weight, BMI, waist-
9 to-hip ratio and chest diameter were measured but only a significant positive effect
10 was observed for chest diameter.
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21 *Smoking cessation interventions*

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24 Two studies evaluated the effect of smoking cessation interventions on smoking
25 abstinence in prisoners (Table 5).^{28,29,33} Both studies used nicotine replacement
26 therapy along with behavioral therapy to support smoking cessation. One study
27 delivered the intervention in a group setting and focused on mood management
28 training to prevent smoking relapse based on previous cognitive-behavioral
29 research.^{28,29} A significant positive effect on smoking abstinence one week after the
30 quit date was observed, and this significant effect was sustained up to six months
31 post intervention.
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44 The other study delivered two face-to-face brief cognitive-behavioral therapy (bCBT)
45 sessions to prisoners and had support systems in place in the form of a telephone
46 counseling service and self-help materials such as booklets and a quit calendar.³³
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51 This intervention had no significant effect on smoking abstinence.
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Study quality

The studies varied in terms of overall quality (Table 6). Three studies received a strong overall rating,^{35,36,38} four received a moderate overall rating^{28-30,33,37} and four received a weak overall rating.^{31,32,34,39} Most of the 'weak' studies had selection bias, did not report the withdrawal rates of participants or had high dropout rates of participants. Most studies received a strong rating for study design, considering confounders and using reliable data collection methods.

Discussion

This is the first systematic review of interventions to improve the health factors or behaviors of the cardiovascular health of prisoners during incarceration. Twelve studies evaluating 11 separate interventions were included. All the studies were conducted in high-income countries and most involved male prisoners. The interventions that were evaluated were classified into four types: structured physical activity, nutrition, mixed with physical activity and education sessions, and smoking cessation. Eight studies measured outcomes related to the health factors associated with cardiovascular health,^{30,31,34-39} while three studies measured outcomes related to behaviors associated with cardiovascular health.^{28,29,32} Most of these were short-term outcomes. The majority of studies received a moderate or weak quality rating.

There is a clear gap in the literature regarding interventions to improve the health factors and behaviors of the cardiovascular health of prisoners while incarcerated, as evident by the small number of studies identified. This is an important finding considering the high prevalence of modifiable CVD risk factors in this population.⁶

1 The small number of smoking cessation studies in particular is worth noting,
2 considering that smoking could be up to two or three times more prevalent in
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4 prisoners compared to the general population.^{40,41}
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7 8 *Effectiveness of interventions* 9

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11 Given the small number of studies in this review, most of which were not of strong
12 quality, there is limited evidence to support their overall effectiveness to improve the
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14 key health factors and behaviors of the cardiovascular health of prisoners. However,
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16 the positive results from some of the studies indicate that interventions involving
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18 supervised structured physical activity, diet modification, nutrition education and
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20 smoking cessation can improve the cardiovascular health of prisoners while
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22 incarcerated.
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29 The four physical activity interventions involved structured exercises that were
30 supervised but differed in terms of duration, frequency, intensity and type of
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32 exercise. Three out of the four interventions had significant effects on three or more
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34 health-related and physical fitness outcomes.^{30,31,37} This suggests that supervised
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36 structured physical activity only can be used as an intervention to improve the
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38 cardiovascular health of male prisoners while incarcerated.
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45 Regarding the nutrition studies, two evaluated interventions in which prisoners
46 adopted a passive role where their diets were modified without their input.^{35,38} Both
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48 these interventions had significant positive effects on at least two measured
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50 outcomes. There can be benefits to providing diet modification interventions to
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52 prisoners as many correctional institutions provide diets that are high in salt and
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54 calories.⁴² However, the effectiveness of these interventions can be reduced where
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1 prisoners have access to canteens which provide foods that are usually high in sugar
2 and fat.⁴³ Additionally, many prisoners tend to make unhealthy choices regarding
3 their food intake,⁴⁴ and therefore providing nutrition education and support to
4 prisoners to help them make healthier dietary choices may be more feasible. The
5 third nutrition intervention comprised of nutrition education workshops that allowed
6 prisoners to adopt a more active role by taking part in a project and doing
7 homework.³² There was a significant improvement in nutrition practices for prisoners
8 who received this intervention. Improved nutrition practices could benefit prisoners
9 given that they are provided with healthy food options.
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22 The two studies that evaluated mixed interventions had a positive significant effect
23 on at least one measured outcome.^{34,39} However both studies had small sample
24 sizes and were of weak quality, therefore their effectiveness could not be
25 determined. Both studies usefully incorporated behavior change techniques (BCTs)
26 which can encourage positive behavior change.⁴⁵ However neither study mentioned
27 the use of behavior change theory to guide the choice of BCTs used in their
28 interventions, although one study did base its intervention on the self-identified
29 health concerns of its participants.^{39,46}
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43 The two smoking cessation studies evaluated the effect of behavioral therapy
44 combined with nicotine replacement on smoking abstinence in prisoners.^{28,29,33} Only
45 one of the interventions had a positive significant effect on smoking abstinence in
46 female prisoners.^{28,29} A possible reason for this is that these prisoners received a
47 greater number of support sessions (10 sessions)^{28,29} compared to those in the other
48 study (2 sessions).³³ Another possibility is that the intervention involving female
49 prisoners was delivered in a group setting;^{28,29} this strategy is considered to be more
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successful in improving long-term quit rates compared to self-help strategies.⁴⁷

Although both studies did not give details to justify the use of BCTs, both did make reference to previous research based on the use of behavioral therapy to support smoking cessation.

Implications for future research

The majority of studies included in this review were of weak or moderate quality which brings into question the validity of their findings. They were still included in this review as details of their interventions could be useful in the development of future, more robust studies to improve the cardiovascular health of prisoners. Additionally, most of the studies involved male prisoners only but there is a need for more studies involving female prisoners, particularly as they are a prisoner sub-group that is disproportionately affected with CVD risk factors, especially lack of physical activity.^{6,48}

Although the two interventions in which prisoners adopted a more active role were of weak quality,^{32,39} there are benefits to incorporating this element in future interventions. By giving prisoners a more active role in interventions, for example, involving them in the intervention design, there can be promotion of self-empowerment, encouragement of communication and shared-decision making and other self-care skills which are traditionally difficult to foster in correctional settings.⁵

Most studies did not describe the process of implementing their interventions, which, given the complexities and influence of the prison environment, is important. Factors such as security and the inflexible nature of the prison regime can create major challenges for prison research.⁴⁹ In our review, details of security levels were given

1 in six studies (Tables 2-5). Overall though, there was little detail provided on the
2 difficulties of intervention implementation relating to security. One study was unable
3 to directly assess an outcome because prisoners were not allowed to leave the
4 prison to access the equipment required to carry out this assessment.³⁶ Another
5 study attributed a lack of proper 'institutionalization' on its difficulty to fully integrate
6 the intervention into the prison regime, but did not explain what this meant.³⁵
7 Describing the implementation process of these interventions could benefit future
8 researchers who are seeking to improve the cardiovascular health of prisoners.
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23 **Conclusion**

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26 In conclusion, this is the first systematic review examining the effectiveness of
27 interventions to improve the key health factors and behaviors of the cardiovascular
28 health of prisoners while incarcerated. Overall, the findings suggest that
29 interventions involving supervised structured physical activity, diet modification,
30 nutrition education and smoking cessation can improve some of these factors such
31 as blood pressure, cholesterol levels and smoking status. However, more rigorous
32 studies are needed to increase the evidence base as there was a lack of high quality
33 studies. The majority of studies used male prisoners and assessed only the short-
34 term effectiveness of the interventions. Although some studies incorporated behavior
35 change techniques, there was minimal reference made to behavior change theory to
36 justify the use of these techniques within the interventions. There was also little
37 information provided regarding the implementation process of interventions given the
38 challenges of correctional environments. Therefore, future research should include
39 female prisoners, assess short-term and long-term outcomes to evaluate intervention
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effectiveness, and support the use of behavior change techniques with evidence-based theory. Future studies should also provide more detail on the intervention implementation process within the correctional setting, as this information could help other researchers to understand and prepare for the challenges posed by the correctional setting.

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Figure legend

Figure 1 – Search strategy for the identification of articles

Dear Editor,

RE: JCN-D-16-00274R1, entitled "A systematic review of interventions to improve the health factors and behaviors associated with the cardiovascular health of prisoners during incarceration"

Thank you for your response to our submitted paper, and we thank the reviewers for their comments. Please find below a response to the comments.

Response to the reviewers’ comments

1) Comment: Please remove the bullets from your text and incorporate the bulleted list into the text. Thanks.

Response: The bullets points have been removed and incorporated into the text as recommended.

Title Page

A systematic review of interventions to improve health factors or behaviors of the cardiovascular health of prisoners during incarceration

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Keywords

Prisoners; cardiovascular health; intervention studies

Abstract

Background: Prisoners are disproportionately affected by cardiovascular disease and its risk factors. However, primary prevention of cardiovascular disease in correctional settings has been widely neglected and there is little information on interventions to improve the cardiovascular health of prisoners while incarcerated.

Objective: To systematically review published literature to identify interventions to improve the health factors or behaviors of the cardiovascular health of prisoners during incarceration.

Methods: Selected databases were searched using terms related to prisoners and cardiovascular disease. Studies were included if they had prisoners as participants and measured outcomes of cardiovascular health. Narrative synthesis was used to organize the evidence from the studies.

Results: Twelve papers detailing 11 studies were identified. Most of the studies involved only males. Interventions were classified into four types: structured physical activity; nutrition; mixed with physical activity and education sessions; and smoking cessation. Most studies measured short-term outcomes relating to cardiovascular health such as changes in blood pressure and weight. Only four studies were of high quality. Structured physical activity interventions, nutrition interventions and smoking cessation interventions delivered in a group setting had significant effects on at least one measured outcome. The effect of mixed interventions could not be determined.

Conclusion: Structured physical activity interventions, nutrition interventions and smoking cessation interventions delivered in a group setting can improve health factors or behaviors of the cardiovascular health of prisoners during incarceration. More high-quality research is needed to increase the evidence base on the effectiveness of these interventions in the correctional setting.

Introduction

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the leading cause of death worldwide and it accounted for approximately 17.5 million deaths in 2012.¹ The most common modifiable risk factors of CVD, physical inactivity, unhealthy diet, tobacco use and excessive alcohol use, are also common risk factors of other non-communicable diseases (NCDs).² These risk factors disproportionately affect certain groups such as women, ethnic minorities and prisoners.³

Prisoners tend to have poorer health than the general population⁴ and there is a higher prevalence of the common modifiable risk factors of CVD in this population compared to the general population.^{5,6} This is due to the high percentage of prisoners being involved in high risk behaviors, for example, 64% to 92% of prisoners smoke.⁵ In some countries, this represents three times the prevalence of smoking in the general population.⁷ Incarceration can also significantly increase prisoners' risk of hypertension⁸ and CVD has shown to be a major cause of death in prisoners both in and out of prison.⁹⁻¹¹

The correctional environment can be very stressful and as a result, many prisoners suffer from mental health issues such as anxiety and depression which have been associated with CVD.⁶ Thus those in positions of authority have a responsibility to provide environments which promote positive prisoner health and wellbeing. Prisoner health is of public health importance as most prisoners will eventually be released back into the community, carrying with them their existing health problems which can increase the burden on public health resources.¹²

1 CVD mortality and morbidity can be reduced by implementing interventions designed
2 to target its modifiable risk factors.² Several guidelines exist which provide evidence-
3 based recommendations to reduce these factors.¹³⁻¹⁵ Behavior change interventions
4 in particular have been recommended in reducing these risk factors.¹⁶ Interventions
5 which involved physician advice, individual counseling, teaching behavioral skills and
6 those that were tailored to the individual's needs have shown to be effective in
7 targeting these risk factors.^{17,18} Unfortunately such interventions have been more
8 geared towards the public domain from which prisons are usually excluded.

9
10 Although CVD and its risk factors are major health problems for prisoners, primary
11 prevention and treatment for NCDs including CVD has largely been neglected.⁵ This
12 is possibly due to a perception that, because the majority of prisoners are young,
13 CVD may not be an issue.¹² There is a need to challenge such perceptions and to
14 implement interventions to promote the cardiovascular health for prisoners.
15 Encouraging prisoners to change their health behaviors while incarcerated could
16 potentially improve their cardiovascular and general health during incarceration,^{19,20}
17 and help improve the health of those who are eventually released into the
18 community.

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20 One recent systematic review identified 95 randomized controlled trials (RCTs) that
21 evaluated interventions to improve the health of prisoners but only two of these
22 focused specifically on cardiovascular health.²¹ The authors looked at RCTs²¹ but
23 studies with this design can be difficult to conduct in a prison setting due to several
24 factors including randomization, anonymity and blinding. This current systematic
25 review was therefore conducted to identify interventions used to improve health

factors or behaviors of the cardiovascular health of prisoners during incarceration and to assess their effectiveness.

Methods

Search strategy and inclusion criteria

The search strategy followed PRISMA guidelines²² to identify all relevant articles. An electronic search for articles was performed in CINAHL, MEDLINE via OVID, PubMed, PsychINFO and the Knowledge Network from inception to May 2016. The following terms were used in individual searches: 'prisoners', 'offenders', 'exercise', 'training', nutrition', 'diet', 'smoking cessation', 'cardiovascular', 'health promotion', and 'wellness'. Each individual search was then combined to identify articles. An example of a search using CINHAL is given in Table 1.

The inclusion criteria for this review were peer-reviewed studies that were based in a correctional setting and had participants who were current prisoners. In this review the term 'prisoners' refers to people incarcerated in prisons, jails and other correctional institutions, including inmates and offenders.

As the nature of correctional regimes makes it difficult to randomize prisoners, studies of differing designs (including RCTs) were included to not eliminate any potentially important studies. Studies had to observe outcomes of at least one of the following health factors and behaviors related to cardiovascular health as outlined by the American Heart Association²³: blood pressure; cholesterol levels; blood glucose levels; physical activity; diet; weight and smoking status. Studies were excluded if they only presented baseline results or if they measured outcomes after participants

1 were released from prison as this review looked at the effect on prisoners while are
2 incarcerated.
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4 A full list of articles was obtained and then screened for duplicates. Abstracts were
5 reviewed to identify the articles according to the inclusion criteria. Reference lists of
6 relevant articles were searched by hand to identify any appropriate studies that could
7 potentially be included in the review. The search strategy and selected full-text
8 articles were reviewed and verified by another researcher (ED). Any discrepancies
9 were discussed. The search strategy is summarized in Figure 1.
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20 *Narrative synthesis*

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23 Narrative synthesis was used to organize the evidence from the studies. This
24 approach is used when studies are too methodologically diverse to be combined in a
25 meta-analysis.²⁴ Data were extracted from the studies using a data extraction
26 template designed for use in the review. The studies were then grouped according to
27 the type of intervention they described, and were presented in tabular form. For all
28 studies, data were extracted on study design, sample size, sample characteristics,
29 type of intervention, intervention duration and outcomes of the study.
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41 *Quality assessment*

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45 The quality of the studies was assessed using the Quality Assessment Tool for
46 Quantitative Studies developed by the Effective Public Health Practice Project
47 (EPHPP).²⁵ A detailed definition of the tool is provided to clarify the assessment
48 process.²⁶ The EPHPP tool was selected above other tools such as the Cochrane
49 Collaboration Risk of Bias Tool (CCRB) as it allows for the assessment of range of
50 study designs, and therefore does not limit the number of studies that can be
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1 included in the review based on design.²⁷ All articles were independently assessed
2 by two researchers (AM and ED) and any discrepancies were discussed and
3 resolved.
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7 **Results**

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10 In total, 833 articles were retrieved, and after removing duplicates, having screened
11 abstracts and full-texts, 12 articles detailing 11 studies were included in this review.
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13 The results from one study were published in two papers.^{28,29} The studies were all
14 carried out in high-income countries: four in the U.S.A.,²⁸⁻³² two in Australia,^{33,34} two
15 in Spain,^{35,36} and one each in Italy,³⁷ Belgium,³⁸ and Canada.³⁹ Eight studies
16 included only males,^{30-34,36-38} two included only females^{28,29,39} and one included both
17 males and females.³⁵
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28 *Structured physical activity interventions*

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31 Four studies evaluated the effect of supervised structured physical activity
32 interventions (Table 2).^{30,31,36,37} Changes in different clinical factors such as blood
33 pressure and cholesterol levels, and changes in physical fitness factors such as
34 muscular endurance and strength were measured. Two studies compared a single
35 intervention group which participated in an exercise program to a control group.^{30,36}
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37 One study observed significant positive effects on the physical fitness of prisoners,³⁰
38 while the other study did not observe any significant effects.³⁶ Two studies compared
39 two or more intervention groups to a control group.^{31,37} One study which evaluated
40 two different training protocols found that cardiovascular and resistance training was
41 more effective in improving the physical fitness of prisoners compared to high
42 intensity strength training.³⁷ The other study compared exercise frequency and found
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that more frequent exercise had more positive effects on body composition compared to less frequent exercise.³¹

Nutrition interventions

Three studies evaluated the effect of nutrition interventions (Table 3).^{32,35,38} Two studies measured health-related outcomes such as BMI, abdominal perimeter, blood pressure and cholesterol levels.^{35,38} Both studies evaluated interventions in which the diet of prisoners were modified. One changed the entire diet of prisoners according to their health needs,³⁵ while the other supplied a diet enhanced with fatty acids.³⁸ The study that changed entire diets observed significant positive effects on the body composition of intervention participants,³⁵ while the other study which used enhanced fatty acid supplementation only observed significant positive effects on diastolic blood pressure and high density lipoproteins in prisoners who smoked.³⁸ The third study evaluated the impact of education and behavioral workshops on the nutrition practices of prisoners.³² This study found that nutrition education and reinforcement of positive healthy nutrition habits had a significantly positive effect on prisoners' nutrition practices.

Mixed interventions

Two studies evaluated mixed interventions that combined physical activity and education sessions (Table 4).^{34,39} Both studies used a prisoner or prisoners to lead part or all of the intervention. One study evaluated the effect of supervised physical activity combined with health education classes on the health of prisoners with chronic illness or risk factors for a chronic illness.³⁴ Changes in anthropometric and clinical variables were measured including weight, blood pressure and blood glucose

1 levels. Significant positive effects were only observed for resting heart rate and
2 endurance.
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5 The other study evaluated the effect of a nutrition and fitness program on the health
6 and wellbeing of female prisoners.³⁹ The program incorporated the use of behavior
7 change techniques such as self-monitoring of eating behavior and goal-setting to
8 help prisoners track their personal fitness progress.³⁹ Changes in weight, BMI, waist-
9 to-hip ratio and chest diameter were measured but only a significant positive effect
10 was observed for chest diameter.
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21 *Smoking cessation interventions*

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24 Two studies evaluated the effect of smoking cessation interventions on smoking
25 abstinence in prisoners (Table 5).^{28,29,33} Both studies used nicotine replacement
26 therapy along with behavioral therapy to support smoking cessation. One study
27 delivered the intervention in a group setting and focused on mood management
28 training to prevent smoking relapse based on previous cognitive-behavioral
29 research.^{28,29} A significant positive effect on smoking abstinence one week after the
30 quit date was observed, and this significant effect was sustained up to six months
31 post intervention.
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44 The other study delivered two face-to-face brief cognitive-behavioral therapy (bCBT)
45 sessions to prisoners and had support systems in place in the form of a telephone
46 counseling service and self-help materials such as booklets and a quit calendar.³³
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51 This intervention had no significant effect on smoking abstinence.
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Study quality

The studies varied in terms of overall quality (Table 6). Three studies received a strong overall rating,^{35,36,38} four received a moderate overall rating^{28-30,33,37} and four received a weak overall rating.^{31,32,34,39} Most of the 'weak' studies had selection bias, did not report the withdrawal rates of participants or had high dropout rates of participants. Most studies received a strong rating for study design, considering confounders and using reliable data collection methods.

Discussion

This is the first systematic review of interventions to improve the health factors or behaviors of the cardiovascular health of prisoners during incarceration. Twelve studies evaluating 11 separate interventions were included. All the studies were conducted in high-income countries and most involved male prisoners. The interventions that were evaluated were classified into four types: structured physical activity, nutrition, mixed with physical activity and education sessions, and smoking cessation. Eight studies measured outcomes related to the health factors associated with cardiovascular health,^{30,31,34-39} while three studies measured outcomes related to behaviors associated with cardiovascular health.^{28,29,32} Most of these were short-term outcomes. The majority of studies received a moderate or weak quality rating.

There is a clear gap in the literature regarding interventions to improve the health factors and behaviors of the cardiovascular health of prisoners while incarcerated, as evident by the small number of studies identified. This is an important finding considering the high prevalence of modifiable CVD risk factors in this population.⁶

1 The small number of smoking cessation studies in particular is worth noting,
2 considering that smoking could be up to two or three times more prevalent in
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4 prisoners compared to the general population.^{40,41}
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7 8 *Effectiveness of interventions* 9

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11 Given the small number of studies in this review, most of which were not of strong
12 quality, there is limited evidence to support their overall effectiveness to improve the
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14 key health factors and behaviors of the cardiovascular health of prisoners. However,
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16 the positive results from some of the studies indicate that interventions involving
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18 supervised structured physical activity, diet modification, nutrition education and
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20 smoking cessation can improve the cardiovascular health of prisoners while
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22 incarcerated.
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29 The four physical activity interventions involved structured exercises that were
30 supervised but differed in terms of duration, frequency, intensity and type of
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32 exercise. Three out of the four interventions had significant effects on three or more
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34 health-related and physical fitness outcomes.^{30,31,37} This suggests that supervised
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36 structured physical activity only can be used as an intervention to improve the
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38 cardiovascular health of male prisoners while incarcerated.
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45 Regarding the nutrition studies, two evaluated interventions in which prisoners
46 adopted a passive role where their diets were modified without their input.^{35,38} Both
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48 these interventions had significant positive effects on at least two measured
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50 outcomes. There can be benefits to providing diet modification interventions to
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52 prisoners as many correctional institutions provide diets that are high in salt and
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54 calories.⁴² However, the effectiveness of these interventions can be reduced where
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1 prisoners have access to canteens which provide foods that are usually high in sugar
2 and fat.⁴³ Additionally, many prisoners tend to make unhealthy choices regarding
3 their food intake,⁴⁴ and therefore providing nutrition education and support to
4 prisoners to help them make healthier dietary choices may be more feasible. The
5 third nutrition intervention comprised of nutrition education workshops that allowed
6 prisoners to adopt a more active role by taking part in a project and doing
7 homework.³² There was a significant improvement in nutrition practices for prisoners
8 who received this intervention. Improved nutrition practices could benefit prisoners
9 given that they are provided with healthy food options.
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22 The two studies that evaluated mixed interventions had a positive significant effect
23 on at least one measured outcome.^{34,39} However both studies had small sample
24 sizes and were of weak quality, therefore their effectiveness could not be
25 determined. Both studies usefully incorporated behavior change techniques (BCTs)
26 which can encourage positive behavior change.⁴⁵ However neither study mentioned
27 the use of behavior change theory to guide the choice of BCTs used in their
28 interventions, although one study did base its intervention on the self-identified
29 health concerns of its participants.^{39,46}
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43 The two smoking cessation studies evaluated the effect of behavioral therapy
44 combined with nicotine replacement on smoking abstinence in prisoners.^{28,29,33} Only
45 one of the interventions had a positive significant effect on smoking abstinence in
46 female prisoners.^{28,29} A possible reason for this is that these prisoners received a
47 greater number of support sessions (10 sessions)^{28,29} compared to those in the other
48 study (2 sessions).³³ Another possibility is that the intervention involving female
49 prisoners was delivered in a group setting;^{28,29} this strategy is considered to be more
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successful in improving long-term quit rates compared to self-help strategies.⁴⁷

Although both studies did not give details to justify the use of BCTs, both did make reference to previous research based on the use of behavioral therapy to support smoking cessation.

Implications for future research

The majority of studies included in this review were of weak or moderate quality which brings into question the validity of their findings. They were still included in this review as details of their interventions could be useful in the development of future, more robust studies to improve the cardiovascular health of prisoners. Additionally, most of the studies involved male prisoners only but there is a need for more studies involving female prisoners, particularly as they are a prisoner sub-group that is disproportionately affected with CVD risk factors, especially lack of physical activity.^{6,48}

Although the two interventions in which prisoners adopted a more active role were of weak quality,^{32,39} there are benefits to incorporating this element in future interventions. By giving prisoners a more active role in interventions, for example, involving them in the intervention design, there can be promotion of self-empowerment, encouragement of communication and shared-decision making and other self-care skills which are traditionally difficult to foster in correctional settings.⁵

Most studies did not describe the process of implementing their interventions, which, given the complexities and influence of the prison environment, is important. Factors such as security and the inflexible nature of the prison regime can create major challenges for prison research.⁴⁹ In our review, details of security levels were given

1 in six studies (Tables 2-5). Overall though, there was little detail provided on the
2 difficulties of intervention implementation relating to security. One study was unable
3 to directly assess an outcome because prisoners were not allowed to leave the
4 prison to access the equipment required to carry out this assessment.³⁶ Another
5 study attributed a lack of proper 'institutionalization' on its difficulty to fully integrate
6 the intervention into the prison regime, but did not explain what this meant.³⁵
7 Describing the implementation process of these interventions could benefit future
8 researchers who are seeking to improve the cardiovascular health of prisoners.
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23 **Conclusion**

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26 In conclusion, this is the first systematic review examining the effectiveness of
27 interventions to improve the key health factors and behaviors of the cardiovascular
28 health of prisoners while incarcerated. Overall, the findings suggest that
29 interventions involving supervised structured physical activity, diet modification,
30 nutrition education and smoking cessation can improve some of these factors such
31 as blood pressure, cholesterol levels and smoking status. However, more rigorous
32 studies are needed to increase the evidence base as there was a lack of high quality
33 studies. The majority of studies used male prisoners and assessed only the short-
34 term effectiveness of the interventions. Although some studies incorporated behavior
35 change techniques, there was minimal reference made to behavior change theory to
36 justify the use of these techniques within the interventions. There was also little
37 information provided regarding the implementation process of interventions given the
38 challenges of correctional environments. Therefore, future research should include
39 female prisoners, assess short-term and long-term outcomes to evaluate intervention
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effectiveness, and support the use of behavior change techniques with evidence-based theory. Future studies should also provide more detail on the intervention implementation process within the correctional setting, as this information could help other researchers to understand and prepare for the challenges posed by the correctional setting.

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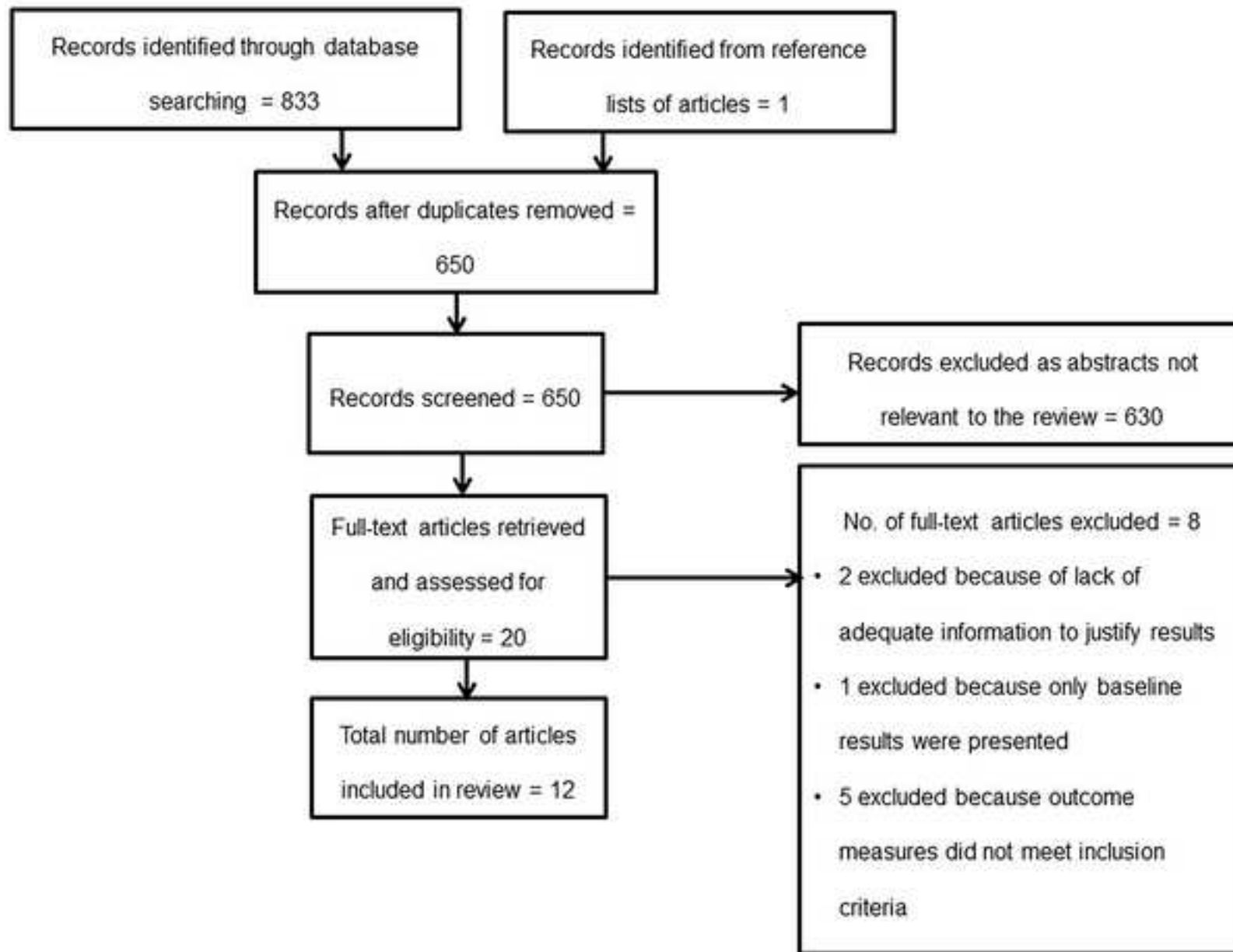
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Figure legend

Figure 1 – Search strategy for the identification of articles



What's new?

- Prisoners are disproportionately affected by cardiovascular disease and its risk factors but few studies were found to have evaluated the effectiveness of interventions to improve the cardiovascular health of prisoners during incarceration.
- Structured physical activity interventions, nutrition interventions and smoking cessation interventions delivered in a group setting can improve health factors or behaviors of the cardiovascular health of prisoners but more research is needed to assess the effectiveness of mixed interventions.
- More high-quality studies are needed to add to the evidence base and future research should include female prisoners and provide details of the intervention implementation process in the correctional setting.

Table 1 – Example of search strategy used in CINAHL

Search #	specific term	no. of results
1	prisoners	9734
2	offenders	7872
3	1 OR 2	7872
4	exercise	94602
5	nutrition	109021
6	diet	79356
7	5 OR 6	79356
8	smoking cessation	16707
9	training	11192
10	4 OR 9	11192
11	wellness	14866
12	health promotion	70462
13	cardiovascular	450713
14	7 OR 8 OR 10 OR 11 OR 12 OR 13	450713
15	3 AND 14	33

Table 2 - Structured physical activity interventions

Table 2 – Summary of the studies using interventions based on structured physical activity only

Study; country	Study design; setting	Sample size (n) and characteristics	Intervention	Outcome
Battaglia et al, 2013 ³⁷ ; Italy	RCT; maximum security prison	n = 75 Male prisoners, ≤ 50 years, no medical conditions that would prevent participation in exercise.	Two intervention groups: 1) cardiovascular plus resistance training or CRT (n=25): aerobic exercises alternating with resistance strength exercises; 2) high intensity strength training or HIST (n=25): anaerobic exercises alternating with maximal strength exercises and active recovery. Duration and intensity of sessions for both groups were gradually increased. Sessions were 1 hour long, twice per week. Control group (n = 25) received no intervention and performed their habitual activities. Duration was 9 months.	CRT group: Significant differences between this group and the control group for oxygen saturation, HDL and all fitness variables except abdominal strength and endurance. No significant differences between this group and the control group for all other health status variables. Significant differences between this group and the HIST group for abdominal and upper body muscular strength and endurance. HIST group: Significant differences between this group and the control group for oxygen saturation, upper body muscular strength and endurance. No significant differences between this group and the control group observed for all other health status and fitness level variables.
Pérez- Moreno et	RCT; minimum security prison	n = 31 Male prisoners, 30-55	Cardiorespiratory and resistance training intervention (n=14). Sessions were 90 minutes long, 3 days per	No significant differences between the intervention and control groups.

al, 2007 ³⁶ ;		years; had a sedentary	week. Exercises focused on cardiorespiratory fitness	
Spain		lifestyle, co-infected with	and lower and upper body strength endurance.	
		HIV/HCV co-infected but	Control group followed usual sedentary lifestyle	
		not immuno-compromised	(n=13). Duration was 4 months.	
		and had an opioid		
		addiction.		
Amtmann	Non-random-	n = 94	Exercise program for older prisoners to improve	Significant differences between intervention and
et al,	ized controlled	Male prisoners, ≥ 40 years.	physical fitness (n=62). Sessions were 3 days per	control groups for body composition, resting HR and
2001 ³⁰ ;	trial; state prison		week. Each session included a warm up, stimulus and	muscular endurance. No significant differences
U.S.A.			cool-down.	between the two groups for body weight, flexibility,
			Control group never participated in the program	resting HR and resting BP.
			(n=32). Duration was 14 weeks.	
Gettman	RCT; county jail	n = 100	Three intervention groups: 1) 1-day group trained 1	5-day group: Significant differences between this
et al,		Healthy male prisoners,	day per week (n=24); 2) 3-day group trained 3 days	group and the control group for TSF, percentage
1976 ³¹ ;		20-35 years.	per week (n=26); 3) 5-day group trained 5 days per	body fat, waist girth and all physical fitness variables
U.S.A.			week (n=30).	except maximum HR and resting BP. Significant
			All sessions were 30 minutes long and consisted of	differences between this group and the 3-day group
			endurance-oriented walking and running, with the run	for resting HR and maximum treadmill performance
			to walk increasing significantly with advancing weeks.	time. Significant differences between this group and
			Control group engaged in non-endurance,	the 1-day group for waist girth and all physical
			recreational activity for two days per week (n=20).	fitness variables except resting BP, maximum HR

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Duration was 20 weeks.	and V ₂ max.
	3-day group: Significant differences between this group and the control group for waist girth and all physical fitness variables except maximum HR and resting blood pressure. Significant differences between this group and the 1-day group for resting HR, maximum HR and V ₂ max.
	1-day group: Significant differences between this group and the control group for all physical fitness variables except maximum HR and resting blood pressure. No significant differences observed for body composition variables.
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BP – blood pressure; HDL – high-density lipoprotein; LDL – low-density lipoprotein; HR – heart rate; TSF – total skinfold fat; V ₂ max – maximum pulmonary ventilation	

Table 3 – Summary of the studies using nutrition interventions

Study; country	Study design; setting	Sample size (n) and characteristics	Intervention	Outcome
Curd et al, 2013 ³² ; U.S.A.	Case control study; minimum security state prison	n = 56 Male prisoners enrolled in a behavioral substance abuse program. Mean age was 35.2 for intervention group and 34.4 for control group.	Intervention group had 3 nutrition workshops based on nutrition and nutritional literacy. Group was taught how nutrition could help in the self- management of common chronic diseases and had their knowledge tested. Reinforcement of healthy nutrition practices occurred through a community vegetable garden project. The first 2 workshops were 4 times per week, 90 minutes long. The third workshop had 5 90-minute sessions (n=19). Control group did not participate in the nutrition workshops (n=37). Duration was 6 months.	Significant difference between intervention and control groups for improved nutrition practices.
Gil- Delgado et al, 2011 ³⁵ ; Spain	Cohort study; prison	n = 139 Male and female prisoners (mean age 44.7) who either had potential cardiovascular risk factors, cachexia due to	Changes to diets were made by a nutritionist. Changes were from a general diet to either a protection diet, a soft diet or a special diet (diabetic, vegetarian, Muslim). Participants were encouraged to increase physical	Significant differences compared to baseline for body composition variables and DBP. Non-significant differences compare to baseline for all clinical variables except triglycerides, blood glucose and glycated hemoglobin. Significant reduction in the number of

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		HCV/HIV or were in need of special diets.	activity frequency. Duration was 1 year.	participants with metabolic syndrome according to IDF.
Sioen et al, 2009 ³⁸ ; Belgium	Cohort study; high security prison	n = 70 Healthy male prisoners, 22-65 years.	Participants given a standard diet for 6 weeks, and then supplied with an n-3 PUFA (polyunsaturated fatty acids) enriched diet for 12 weeks. The new diet contained 6.5g of n-3 PUFA/day compared to 4g of n-3 PUFA/day in the standard diet.	Significant differences compared to baseline for DBP and HDL in smokers. No significant differences compared to baseline for all other anthropometric and clinical variables.
IDF – International Diabetes Federation; DBP – diastolic blood pressure; HDL – high-density lipoprotein				

Table 4 – Summary of the studies using interventions based on physical activity and education sessions

Study; country	Study design; setting	Sample size (n) and characteristics	Intervention	Outcome
Elwood Martin et al, 2013 ³⁹ ; Canada	Before and after study; medium security prison	n = 28 Female prisoners ≥18 years.	Intervention was partly designed by prisoners through a participatory research process and led by a prisoner certified in health and fitness. Participants received a food guide and personalized food chart which were used to help self-monitor eating behavior, and attended a nutrition education session once per week. Participants joined a group circuit class or followed personalized exercise plans. Duration was 6 weeks.	Significant improvement in chest measurement compared to baseline. No significant changes observed for weight, BMI and waist-to-hip ratio.
Cashin et al, 2008 ³⁴ ; Australia	RCT; maximum security prison	n = 20 Male prisoners ≥ 40 years who either had chronic illness or ≥ 2 risk factors for chronic illness.	Participants attended sessions on cardio-respiratory endurance, strength and flexibility training. Sessions were led by prisoner peer leaders. Exercise was group-based but each participant had a personal plan. Participants attended 3 health education classes on healthy eating and self-management in the prison	Significant differences between intervention and control groups for resting HR and endurance. A significant difference was observed between the two groups for DBP, with the control group seeing the greatest improvement after the intervention (this difference occurred on pre-testing). No significant differences observed for all other measured outcomes.

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environment (n=20).

Control group continued with their usual
exercise regime (n=20). Duration was 12
weeks.

DBP – diastolic blood pressure; HR – heart rate

Table 5 – Summary of the studies using interventions based on smoking cessation only

Study; country	Study design; setting	Sample size (n) and characteristics	Intervention	Outcome
Richmond et al, 2012 ³³ ; Australia	RCT; prison	n = 425 Males prisoners >18 years who had moderate/high nicotine dependence and expressed a readiness to quit smoking.	Intervention group received 2 face-to-face bCBT sessions, active NOR, active nicotine patches and had access to a telephone counseling service and support tools. NOR given at the start of week 1 and smoking cessation date was set on week 3. Nicotine patches were given on week 3 (n=206). Control group received the same as the intervention group except that a placebo NOR was used (n=219). Duration was 12 weeks.	No significant differences between intervention and control groups for continuous abstinence and point prevalence abstinence at 3, 6 or 12 months.
Cropsey et al, 2008 ²⁹ & 2011 ²⁸ ; U.S.A.	RCT; prison	n = 360 Female prisoners (mean age 33.8) who smoked at least 5 cigarettes per day and expressed interest in smoking cessation.	Intervention group received mood management training to prevent smoking relapse. Training was group-based and included mood management skills and standard behavioral techniques for smoking cessation. Group attended 1 session per week for 10 weeks. Nicotine replacement started in week 3 of in the	One week after targeted quit date, there was a significantly greater increase in smoking abstinence for intervention group compared to control group. Significance in abstinence between groups remained until 6 months after completion of the intervention. For intervention group, there was a gradual decline in abstinence from week 5 till the 6-month follow-up

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	intervention and participants were asked to	point. 46% of intervention participants relapsed after 1
	make quit attempts during weeks 3 and 4	week of abstinence.
	(n=250).	
	Control group were on a 6-month waiting list	
	(n=289). Duration was 10 weeks.	

bCBT – brief cognitive-behavioral therapy; NOR – nortriptyline

Table 6 – Ratings of items of methodological quality based on criteria by the EPHPP

	Selection bias	Study design	Confoun- ders	Blinding	Data collection methods	Withdrawals and dropouts	Global rating
Battaglia et al, 2013 ³⁷	Moderate	Strong	Strong	Weak	Strong	Moderate	Moderate
Elwood Martin et al, 2013 ³⁹	Weak	Moderate	Weak	Weak	Weak	Weak	Weak
Curd et al, 2013 ³²	Weak	Moderate	Strong	Weak	Weak	Strong	Weak
Richmond et al, 2012 ³³	Moderate	Strong	Weak	Moderate	Strong	Strong	Moderate
Gil- Delgado et al, 2011 ³⁵	Moderate	Moderate	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Moderate	Strong
Sioen et al, 2009 ³⁸	Moderate	Moderate	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Strong	Strong
Cropsey et al, 2008 ²⁹ & 2011 ²⁸	Strong	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Weak	Moderate
Cashin et al, 2008 ³⁴	Weak	Strong	Weak	Moderate	Strong	Moderate	Weak
Perez- Moreno et	Moderate	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Moderate	Strong

al, 2007³⁶

Amtmann

et al,	Moderate	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Weak	Moderate
2001 ³⁰							

Gettman

et al,	Weak	Strong	Strong	Weak	Strong	Weak	Weak
1976 ³¹							
