

Sport policy impact on physical activity: a systematic review

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What is already known on this topic

Benefits and harms

Participation in sport can contribute substantially to health by promoting physical activity (1). Sport participation is also associated with other benefits such as enhanced wellbeing, quality of life and even academic performance (2).

Priority of the problem

Publications released by the European Commission reveal that nearly half (46%) of Europeans never exercise or participate in sport, in spite of the various benefits mentioned above (3). Studies of the determinants of sport participations show disparities between males and females, young and old and people of higher and lower levels of education (4).



What our studies add

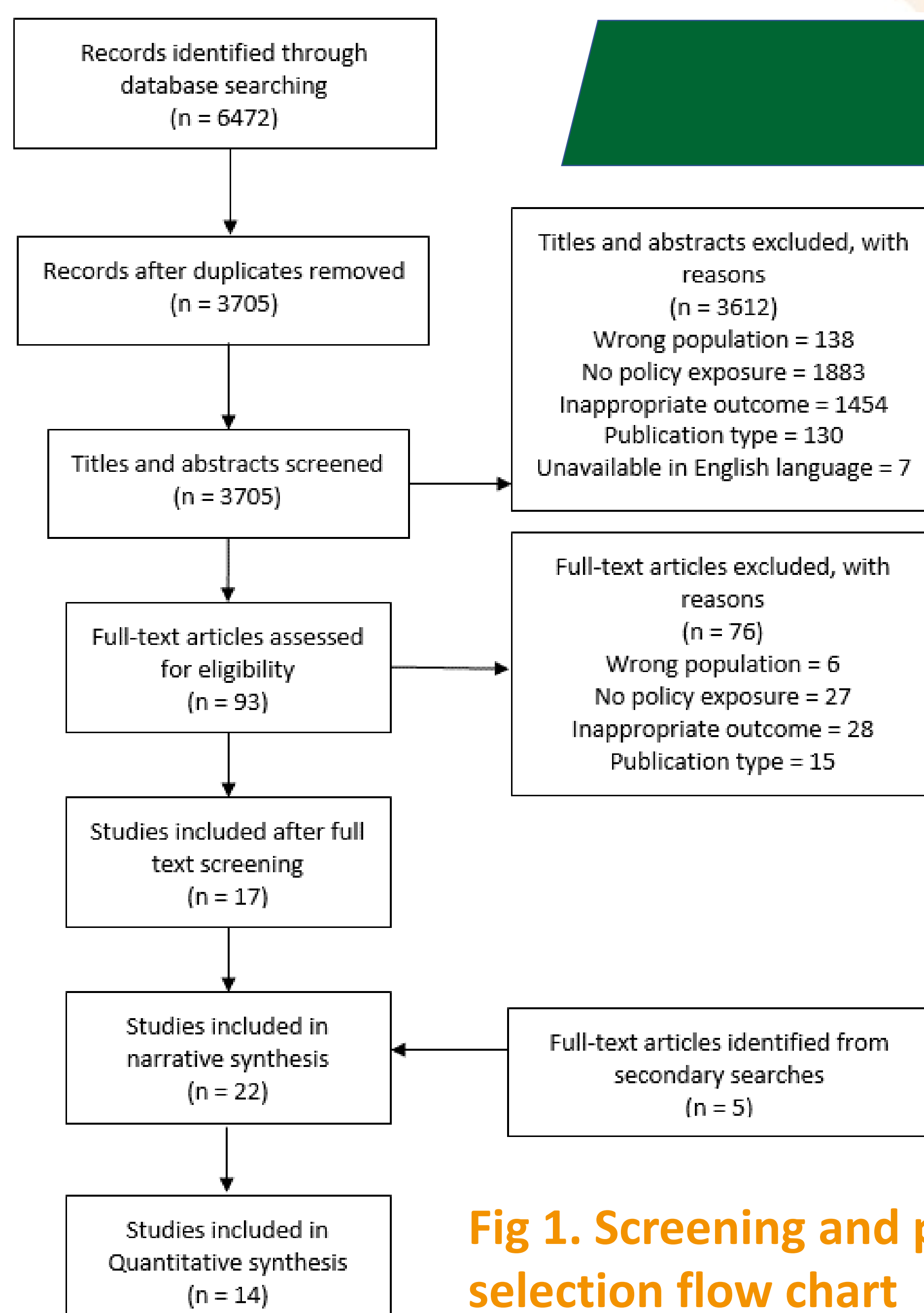


Fig 1. Screening and paper selection flow chart

We searched 6472 items, which we reduced to 22 academic papers for evidence of physical activity promoting sport policies. Drawing upon evidence from both qualitative and quantitative study designs, we generated the four categories of policy intervention identified in our review:

- 1. Facility Availability** (Build multipurpose sport infrastructure and facilities).
- 2. Financial Incentives** (Provide free access for identified target groups [under 16s and over 60s or people on benefits]; Provide a voucher programme subsidising structured PA and sports).
- 3. Collaboration** (Fund programmes that collaborate with county sports partnerships to increase sport participation in hard-to-reach groups; Promote detailed shared use agreements).
- 4. Exhortation** (Combine free access with outreach measures; Leverage sporting mega-events to promote physical activity).

Policy recommendations

1. Ensure adequate access to sport facilities.

Policies to build sports facilities have correlated with increased sport participation levels.

2. Beware the complicated effects of financial incentives.

Some studies suggest that providing free entry to public swimming pools leads to displacement of existing users of those facilities.

3. Build the capacity of sports clubs.

Expecting sports clubs to promote physical activity behaviours may conflict with their competitive priorities.

4. Understand that the least active are hard to reach via sport.

Many public policy interventions are reported to work on people who are moderately motivated to participate in physical activity.



Literature reference

1 Eime et al., 2015 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26290046/>; 2 Taylor et al., 2015 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-review-of-the-social-impacts-of-culture-and-sport>; 3 European Commission 2018 <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2164>; 4 Hovemann and Wicker 2009 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/16138171.2009.11687827>

Overarching paper: Volf et al., (Submitted for review) Evidence of the Impact of Sport Policies on Physical Activity and Sport Participation: A Systematic Mixed Studies Review