

Why are Cervical Screening Rates Lower in Women with Learning Disabilities?

A systematic Review



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Background

Globally, women and people with a cervix are offered screening for cervical cancer ranging between the ages of 20 to 65, although testing has continued after 65 due to abnormalities. However, participation in the cervical screening program has shown to be much less in women with learning disabilities (Parish, 2006)

Aims

To systematically review qualitative and quantitative studies that discuss women with learning disabilities and cervical screening with the aim of understanding:

- Access to screening
- Experience with screening
- Barriers to screening
- Facilitators to screening participation

METHODS

Databases:

PubMed, EMBASE, CINAHL, OpenGrey, Cochrane Library and PsychINFO

P Women with learning disabilities, family members, careworkers, and screening and healthcare professionals

O Identification of barriers and patient engagement in preventative cervical screening

Prospero
Registration ID:
CRD42024562588



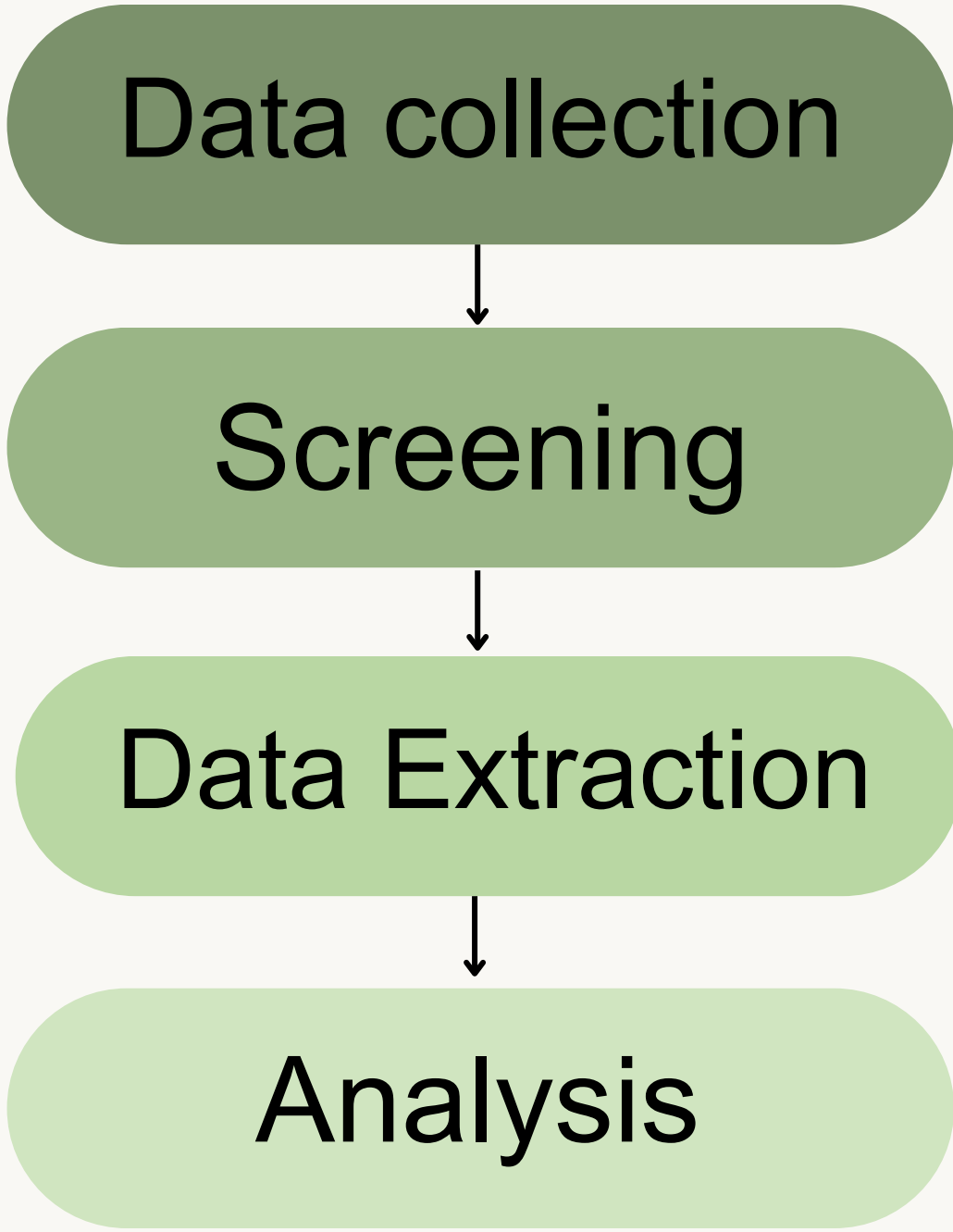
Serach Terms

Intellectual disability

Learning Disability

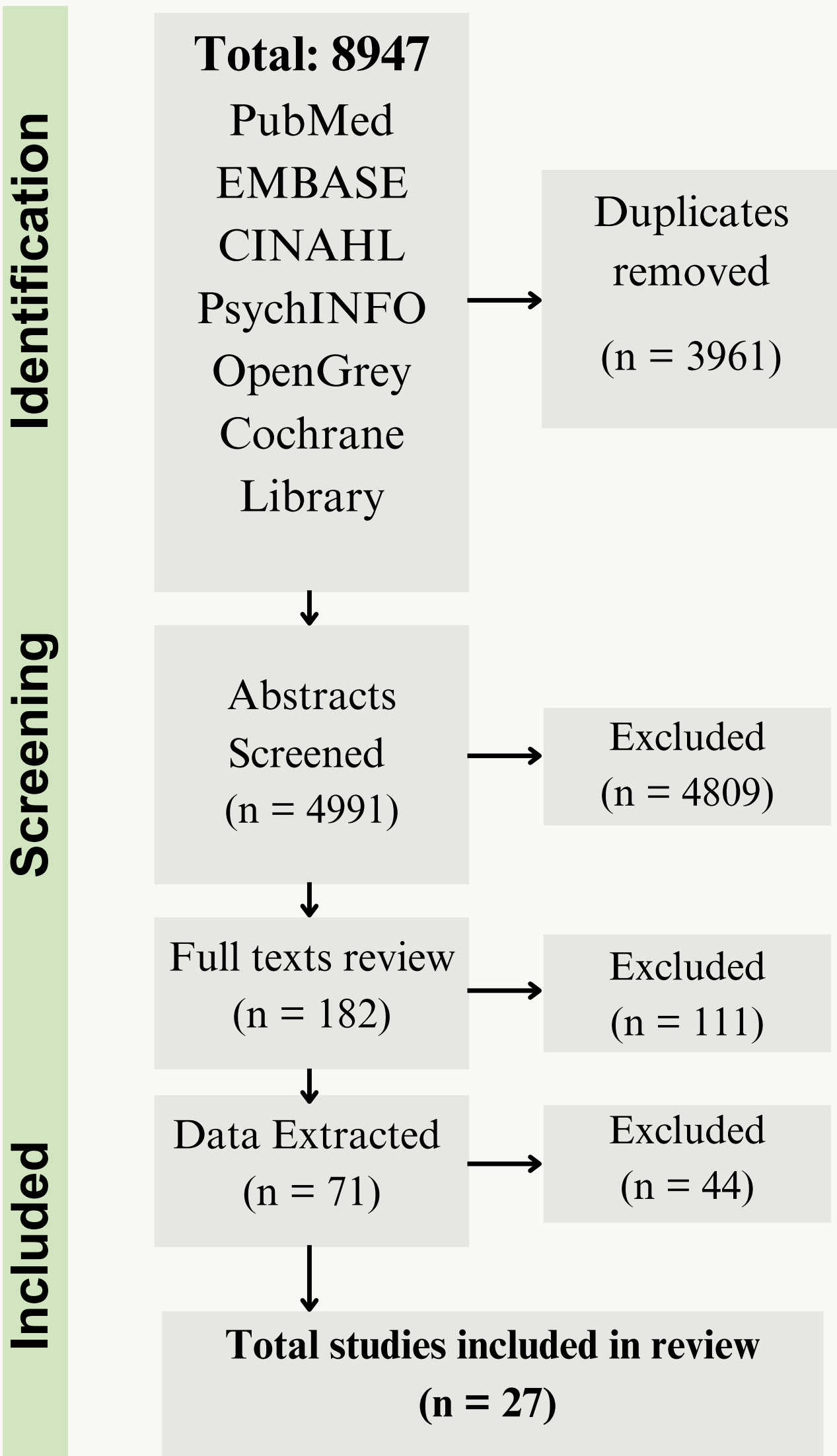
PAP Test

Cervical Screening



RESULTS

Identification of studies via databases and registers



Women with intellectual disabilities were **72% less likely** than women without disabilities to have received screening for cervical cancer (Parish, 2006)

Reasons for lower screening rates

- Procedural fear and embarrassment
- Lack of understanding and preparation for the patient (Lee, 2024)
- Access to screening, whether it be transportation or being offered screening (Broughton, 2000)
- Women with learning disabilities are often not given the support they require with these intimate examinations, causing anxiety as well as support in advocating for themselves (Broughton, 2000)



Outcome and Experience

- Higher incidence of cancer in the corpus uteri and ovaries (Parish, 2006)
- Because women with learning disabilities have limited knowledge and understanding of the exam, caregivers and proxies often have difficulties accurately reporting their screening history (Parish, 2006)
- Due to physician's lack of knowledge, social stigma and assumptions about women with learning disabilities, patients often do not feel comfortable disclosing their medical history regarding their reproductive and sexual health, resulting in inadequate care (Parish, 2006)

Discussion

These preliminary results indicate that women with learning disabilities often lack understanding of the screening procedure; in addition, they are often not offered screening at all, which highlights inadequate reproductive care, largely due to physicians' lack of awareness (Parish, 2006). These results from early analysis provide an initial view of the barriers and facilitators that may impact the access and experience of women with a learning disability.

75% of the women with a learning disability **did not understand the purpose of the cervical smear test**, this included both women who had and who had not received the cervical smear test (Broughton, 2000).

Parish, S. L., & Saville, A. W. (2006). Women with cognitive limitations living in the community: evidence of disability-based disparities in health care. *Mental retardation*, 44(4), 249–259. [https://doi.org/10.1352/0047-6765\(2006\)44\[249:WWCLLI\]2.0.CO;2](https://doi.org/10.1352/0047-6765(2006)44[249:WWCLLI]2.0.CO;2)
Broughton, S., & Thomson, K. (2000). Women with learning disabilities: risk behaviours and experiences of the cervical smear test. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 32(4), 905–912.
Lee, M. S., Day, A. D., Bassford, T. L., Lininger, M. R., Armin, J. S., & Williamson, H. J. (2024). Primary Care Providers' Experiences Recommending and Performing Cervical Cancer Screening for Women with Intellectual Disabilities: A Qualitative Study. *Journal of cancer education : the official journal of the American Association for Cancer Education*, 10.1007/s13187-024-02454-5. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13187-024-02454-5>