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The Role of Antenatal Physical Activity in Preventing Postpartum Depression

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Background

Postpartum depression (PPD) is a debilitating and potentially dangerous illness that many women face. Though there are several accepted methods of treatment of PPD, there are currently no clinical recommendations for preventative measures that can be taken. Physical activity has been shown to prevent other forms of depression, however there is a lack of consistent evidence regarding the efficacy of physical activity in preventing postpartum depression.

Objectives

The purpose of this integrative literature review is to identify the effectiveness of physical activity in the prevention of PPD. Additionally, limitations will be addressed in an effort to make recommendations for future studies.



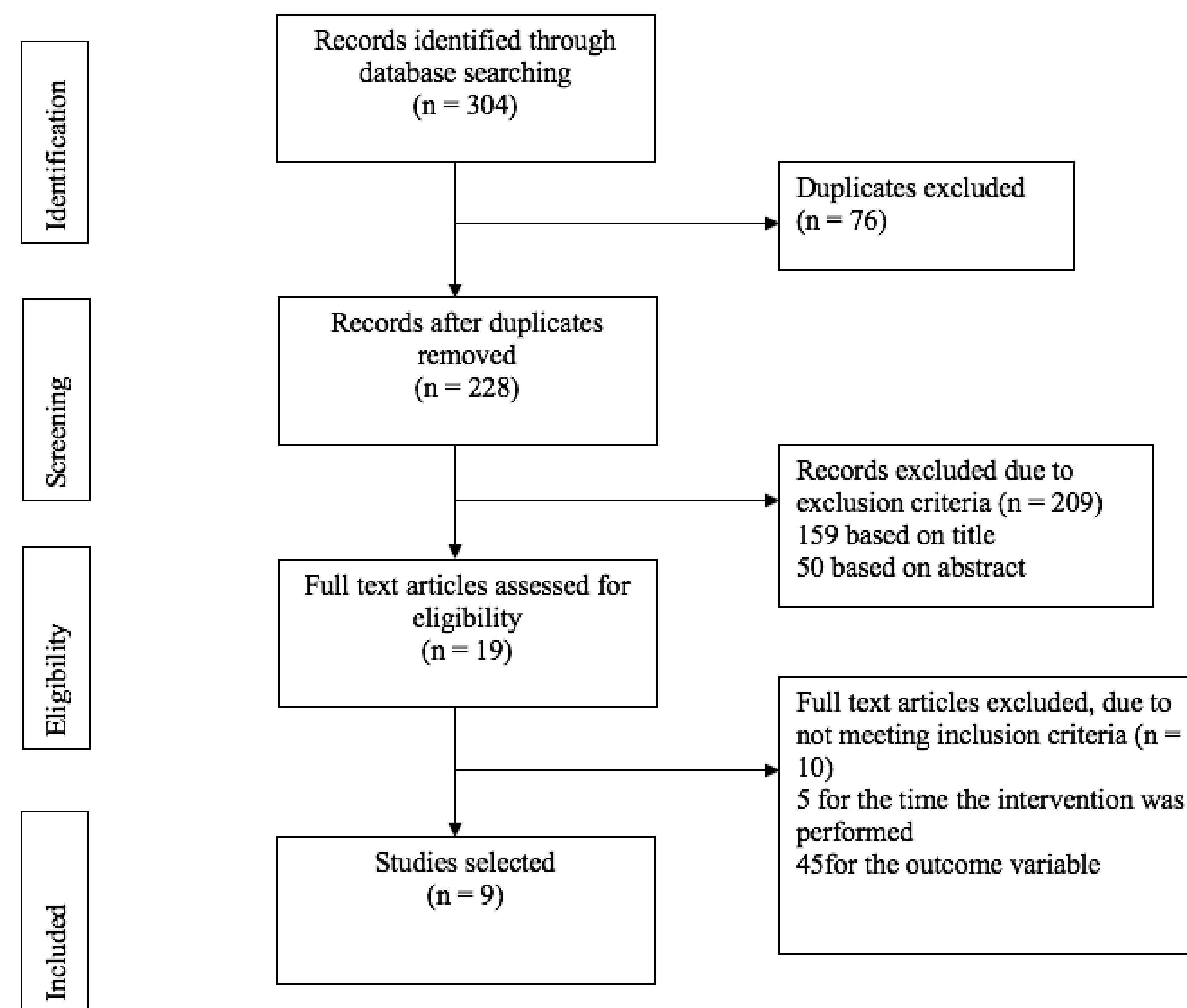
Research Question

Is physical activity an effective tool in the prevention of PPD?

Methods

The following data bases were used to conduct a literature search: Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), PubMed, PsychInfo, and ProQuest. Search terms included four main categories; depression, pregnancy, exercise, and prevention. The data range was set to include all studies within the past ten years.

Figure 2. Preliminary Search Results

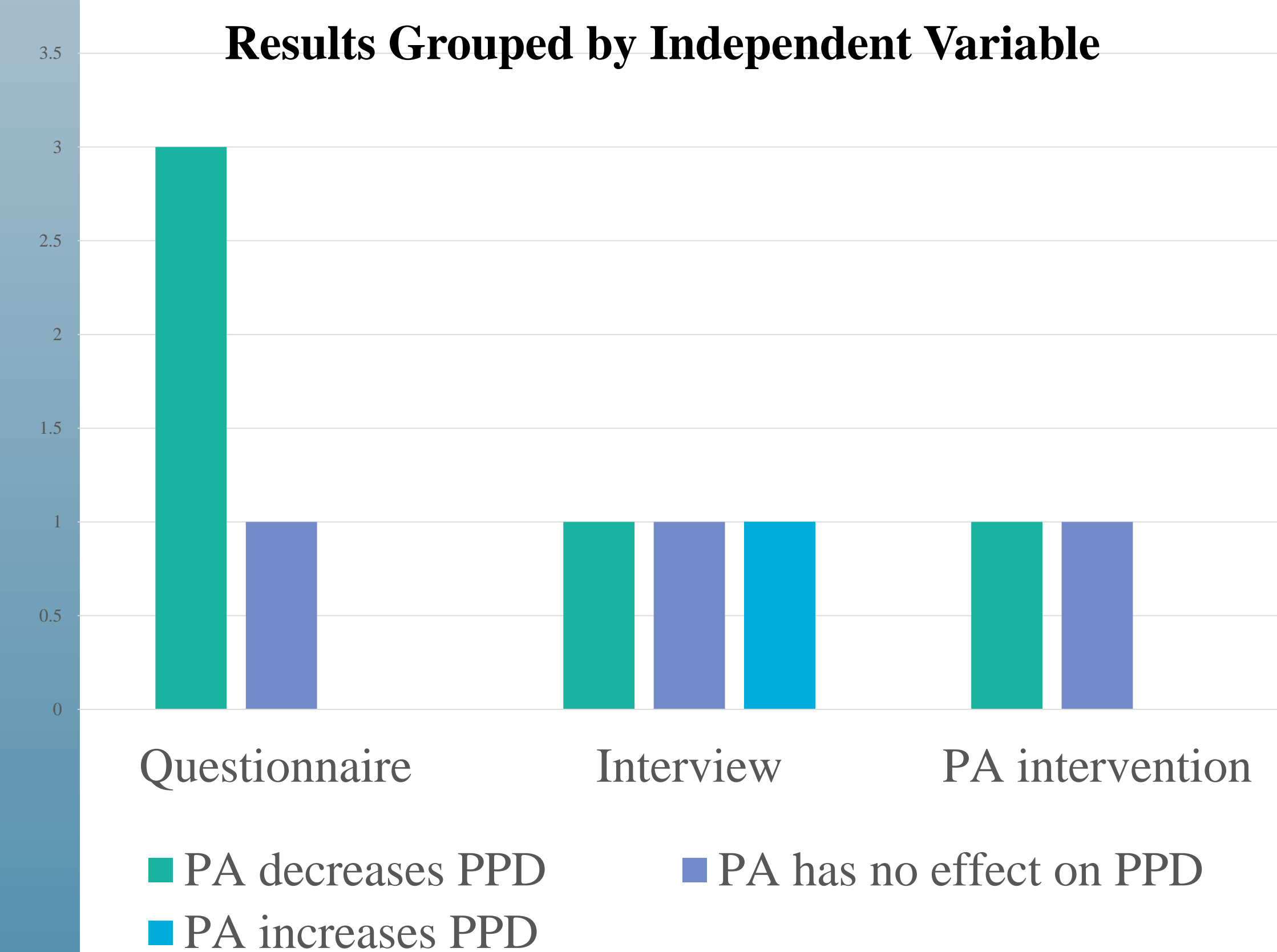


Results

Results of the nine studies included in this literature review are illustrated in the chart below. Due to the inconsistencies in results, it is not possible to determine whether or not physical activity performed antenatally has any impact on postpartum depression.

Limitations of existing research:

- Lack of research
- Self-reporting in either the independent or dependent variable or both
- Reluctance to be truthful about depressive symptoms due to stigma
- Difficult to differentiate somatic depressive symptoms, and postpartum symptoms
- Lack of consistency in outcome measures
- Lack of geographical diversity



Future Research

- Focus on objective measures
 - Independent variable: direct exercise interventions
 - Dependent variable: EPDS
- Incorporate a wide variety of geographical locations