

A Systematic Literature Review of Training Programs for Prisoners in the United States

Hannah Stockdale, Melissa Robertson, *Ph.D.*, Lillian Eby, *Ph.D.*

Department of Psychology, University of Georgia

INTRODUCTION

Every year in the United States, a large number of ex-offenders are convicted of a new crime after their initial release. Although the national statistic for prison recidivism is debated, a study published in 2018 by the U.S Department of Justice reported that 83% of state prisoners released in 2005 across 30 states were arrested again at least once after their release (Alper, et al., 2018). One factor that contributes to this high rate of recidivism is that many ex-inmates lack the career- and job-related skills needed to integrate back into society and obtain stable employment (Petersilia 2004). This suggests that there may be utility in providing a variety of skills-based training programs either during time in prison or immediately after release. However, currently there is limited cumulative knowledge about the types of training programs that exist for prisoners or the extent to which such programs are effective.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

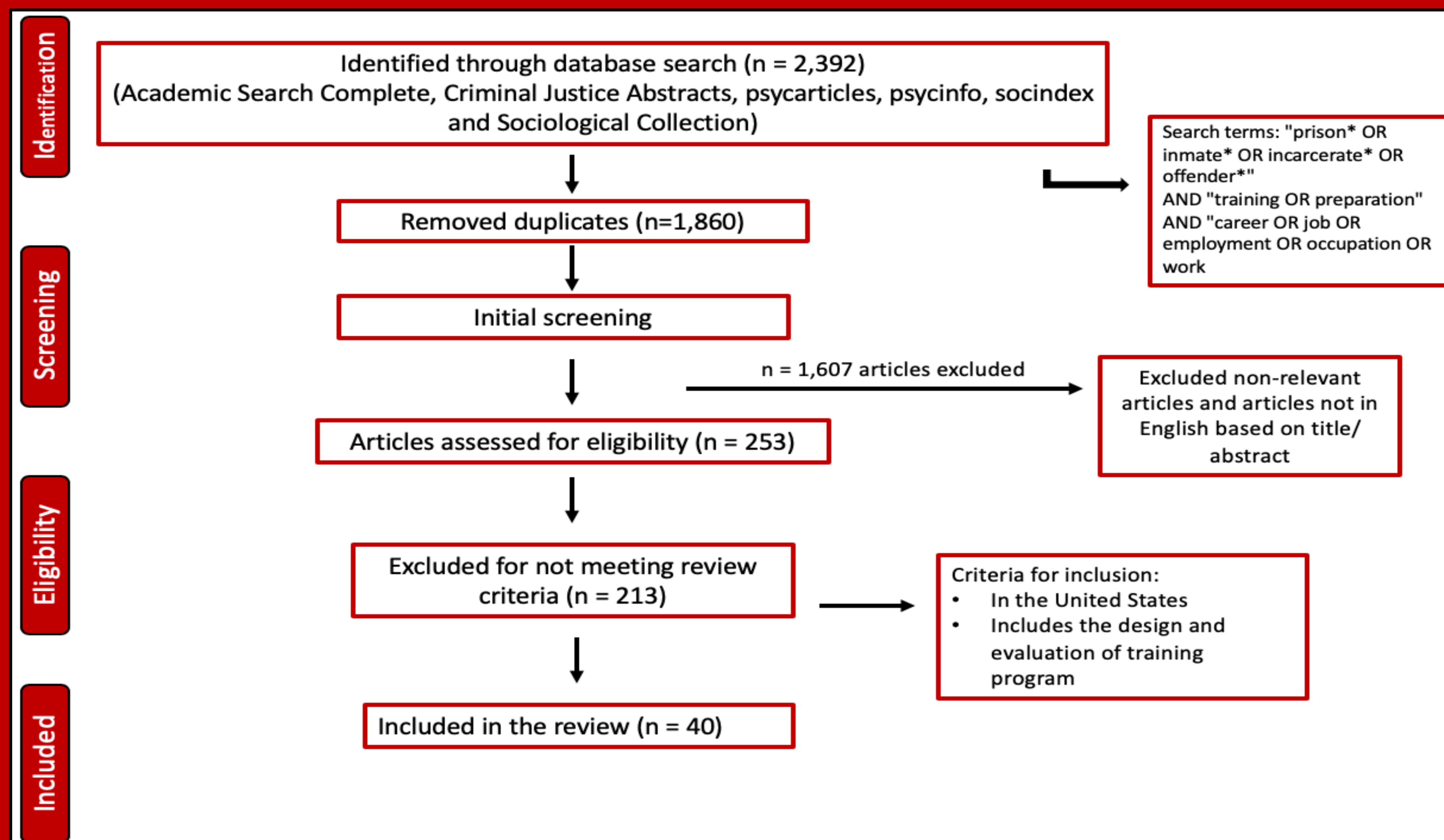
RQ1: What types of training programs exist for prison inmates in the United States?

RQ2: To what extent do existing training programs demonstrate positive effects on recidivism and other outcomes (e.g. employment)?

RQ3: Are multi-component programs associated with more positive outcomes than stand-alone programs?

RQ4: Does program effectiveness vary by prisoner age, sex, type of offense, when in the correctional process training is offered (pre-prison, during prison, probation), and the type of training provided (e.g., trade skills, interpersonal skills, resume building, job-related skills such math, reading and writing)?

METHOD



PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Preliminary review suggests training programs can result in positive outcomes for prison inmates in both adult and juvenile facilities. There is also general consensus in the literature that recidivism can be remedied through education and/or job training. However, the type of training and the point in correctional process the training is provided varied greatly from study to study. Despite differences in the type of training offered, the majority of programs reviewed thus far suggest multi-component programs may be more beneficial than stand-alone training. For example, PRIDE (Mann, 1997), an employment intervention for drug-abusing offenders, offered industrial job skill training as well as social and employability skills. Similarly, a work-release training program offered to inmates in a minimum-security Illinois state prison gives prisoners educational, public service and vocational training (Jung, 2014). Some of the more unique types of training identified through this review include public service training, independent living skills, family intervention and parent training. A key difference between the different training programs reviewed appears to be the point in the correctional process when the training is offered. Studies that report on multi-component programs that intervene during multiple points of the correctional process have demonstrated positive outcomes (e.g., more likely to get involved in work/school, less likely to end up back in prison). All of the articles reviewed report that the majority of participants are male. The highest percentage of female inclusion in the programs reviewed is 36% (Moody, et al., 2008).

DISCUSSION

The general trend of multi-component programs resulting in positive outcomes suggests the importance of multiple points of assistance from the program facilitators. The lack of women involved in training programs is most likely result of the disproportionate number of male prisoners in the United States (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2019). However, it is important that females have access to training programs as well. While speculative, there may be benefits to providing programming specialized to women that also focus on topics such as family planning and leadership training.

Implications

This literature review will help identify areas of high priority for future research and provide practical information for prison administrators and individuals engaged in the probation system. If research can demonstrate that training programs do significantly reduce recidivism, federal, state, and local government may be more encouraged to fund these programs. This could result in more inmates receiving programming that increases their chances of successful reintegration into their families and communities.

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