Risk of bias assessment tools used in non-Cochrane reviews of interventions: a meta-epidemiologic study

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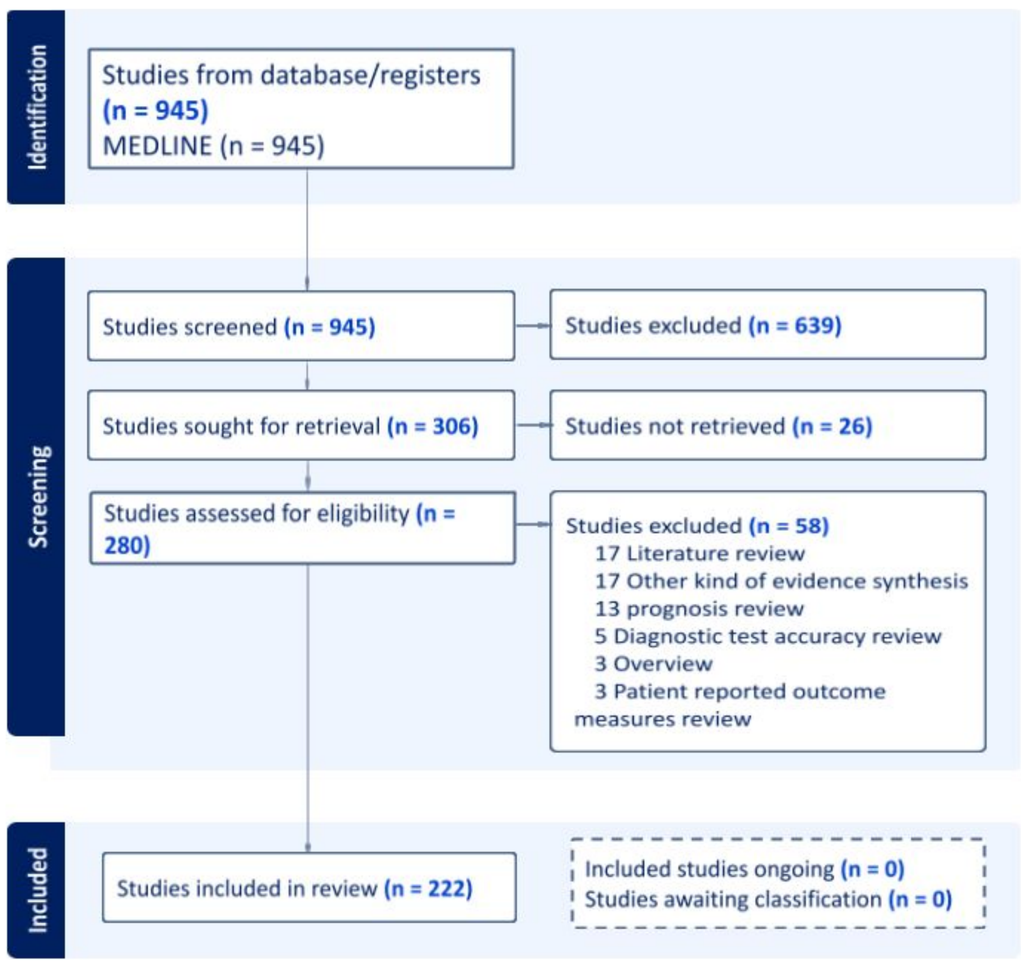
Background:

- Biases can lead to misestimate the true intervention effect.
- There are many tools for assessing the risk of bias.
- The certainty of the evidence is the extent to which we can be confident that what the research tells us about a particular treatment effect is likely to be accurate.
- It remains uncertain whether non-Cochrane systematic reviews adhere to the risk of bias tools and the certainty of the evidence assessment.

Objetives: *To identify the RoB tool used in non-Cochrane systematic reviews (NCSRs) of interventions and to assess the use of the GRADE approach for assessing the certainty of the evidence.*

Methods: Cross-sectional study. We searched in MEDLINE for completed NCSRs of any intervention published since 2022. We extracted a random sample of 10% of the final search results.
Only systematic reviews for intervention were included. Cochrane systematic reviews and protocols were excluded. We extracted information regarding country, journal, use of any RoB tool, RoB tool used and use of GRADE approach. Data were extracted by one reviewer and validated by a second author.



Results

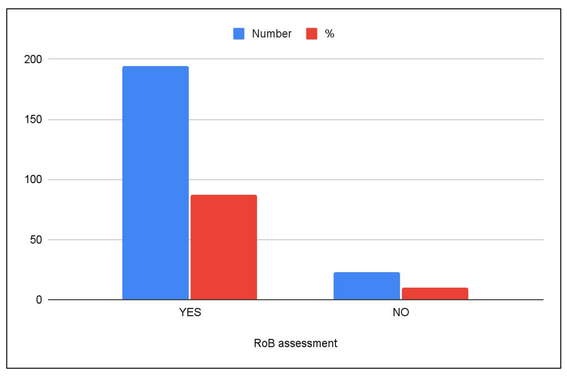
Publication year	Number (%)
2022	89 (85.14)
2023	33 (14.86)

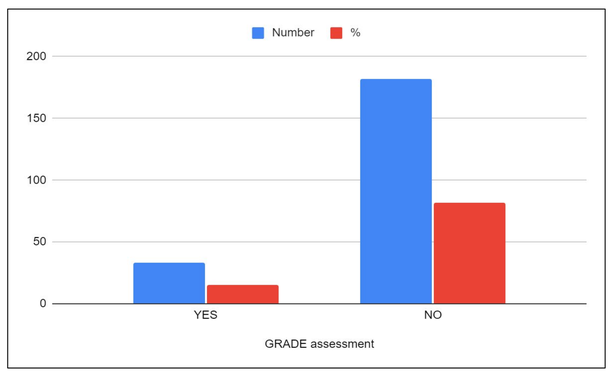
Population	Number (%)
≥ 18 years	145 (65.32)
< 18 years	38 (17.12)
Mixed	31 (13.96)
Not reported	23 (10.36)

Intervention	Number (%)
Surgery	80 (36.04)
Pharmacological	58 (26.13)
Physical therapies	45 (20.27)
Others	29 (13.06)
Psicological	6 (2.7)
Nutritional	3 (1.35)

RoB assessment	Number (%)
YES	194 (87.39)
NO	23 (10.36)

GRADE assessment	Number (%)
YES	34 (15.32)
NO	188 (84.68)





RoB tools	Number (%)
RoB 2	59 (26.58)
RoB 1	52(23.42)
PEDro	13 (5.86)
Newcastle - Ottawa scale	11 (4.95)
Methodological index for non-randomized studies (MINORS) criteria	11 (4.95)
Others	21.17 (47)

Conclusion:

- The majority of the NCSR assessed the risk of bias.
- The assessment tools were highly variable.
- While some of the bias assessment tools employed were not consistently suitable, the predominant ones demonstrated appropriateness.
- The uptake of the GRADE approach was low.
- Further exploration is needed to understand the underlying factors driving bias evaluation over certainty assessment within NCSR.

Cochrane Argentina

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