

Conclusions These findings must be interpreted with caution because any word search is dependent on the use of language, which varies between countries and language groups, and over time. Also, the affiliation field refers only to the first author. With these caveats, this historical analysis supports some anecdotal impressions about occupational epidemiology: Nordic countries, relative to their size, have made a major contribution; historically, papers have come from a small pool of countries; the large volume of papers from the USA is likely to be influential; and the trend of accelerating research output seen in the twentieth century may have stabilised.

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ADDRESSING CONTINUOUS DATA FOR PARTICIPANTS EXCLUDED FROM TRIAL ANALYSIS: A GUIDE FOR SYSTEMATIC REVIEWERS

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Objectives To develop a framework for handling missing participant data for continuous outcomes in systematic reviews and assess its impact on risk of bias.

Methods We conducted a consultative, iterative process. We considered sources that reflect real observed outcomes in participants followed-up in individual trials included in the systematic review, and developed a range of plausible strategies that would be progressively more stringent in challenging the robustness of the pooled estimates. We applied our approach to two example systematic reviews.

Results We used 5 sources of data for imputing the means for participants with missing data: [A] the best mean score among the intervention arms of included trials, [B] the best mean score among the control arms of included trials, [C] the mean score from the control arm of the same trial, [D] the worst mean score among the intervention arms of included trials, [E] the worst mean score among the control arms of included trials. To impute SD, we used the median SD from the control arms of all included trials. Using these sources of data, we developed four progressively more stringent imputation strategies.

In the first example review, effect estimates were diminished and lost significance as the strategies became more stringent, suggesting the need to rate down confidence in estimates of effect for risk of bias. In the second review, effect estimates maintained statistical significance using even the most stringent strategy, suggesting missing data does not undermine confidence in the results. The differences are due to: [1] the size of the effect and its precision, and [2] the percentage of missing participant data.

Conclusions Our approach provides rigorous yet reasonable and relatively simple, quantitative guidance for judging the impact of risk of bias as a result of missing participant data in systematic reviews of continuous outcomes.

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ENGLISH-SPEAKING REVIEWERS CAN CORRECTLY IDENTIFY FOREIGN-LANGUAGE ARTICLES THAT MEET ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF MANAGEMENT FOR FIBROMYALGIA

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Objective To assess whether English-speaking reviewers can identify foreign-language articles that are eligible for a systematic review of all treatments for fibromyalgia.

Methods Systematic review of AMED, CINAHL, EMBASE, MEDLINE, HealthSTAR, PsycINFO, Papers First, Proceedings First and CENTRAL, from inception of each database to April, 2011, to identify all randomised controlled trials exploring any form of therapy for fibromyalgia. All non-English language articles were identified and screened for eligibility by native-language reviewers. English-speaking reviewers screened all non-English language, guided by 10 questions, in order to identify those that were eligible for review.

Results Of 15,466 potentially eligible studies we retrieved 763 in full text, of which 133 were published in 19 non-English languages; 431 studies proved eligible of which 53 were published in languages other than English. Agreement between English and native-language reviewers for assessment of eligibility of the 133 foreign language articles was 89% and the chance-corrected agreement was substantial ($\kappa = 0.77$). Use of a simple 4-step rule (excluding languages with only one or two articles, reviewing titles and abstracts for clear indications of eligibility, noting the lack of a clearly reported statistical analysis unless the word 'random' appears, and noting features of systematic review) preserved the highest proportion of eligible articles (96%) with the fewest number of foreign-language reviewer teams needed ($n = 9$).

Conclusions We identified strategies that English-speaking reviewers can implement to ameliorate the burden associated with including eligible non-English language studies in systematic reviews.

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THE USE OF ECOLOGICAL DATA TO GENERATE HYPOTHESES ON EXOGENOUS RISK FACTORS FOR (RARE) CANCERS

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There is a public health need to balance timely generation of hypotheses with cautious causal inference. For rare cancers this is particularly challenging because standard epidemiological study designs may not be able to elucidate causal factors in an early period of emerging risks.

We have previously demonstrated that open-access databases (the GLOBOCAN 2008 resource combined with data from the United Nations Development Report and the World Bank list of Development Indicators) can be used to explore associations between potential risk factors and incidence of cancer of the brain and central nervous system at an ecological level (publication in press).

In this study we showed that the only exogenous risk factor consistently associated with higher incidence rates of cancer of the brain and central nervous system was the penetration rate of mobile/cellular telecommunications subscriptions. Furthermore,