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Mental Health Constructs and Tools in Exercise Oncology: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis

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Purpose

Psychological constructs have been shown to independently effect health outcomes and overall quality of life in the psycho-oncology literature. Whilst exercise can positively influence psychological constructs, studies in oncology populations often limit their measurement to negative psychological constructs (e.g. depression), with limited evidence exploring positive psychological constructs (e.g. optimism). This systematic review aims to evaluate which psychological constructs have been utilised, and which have been found to effectively respond to exercise, within the exercise oncology literature.

Methods

A systematic search of PubMed, EMBASE, CINAHL, and Cochrane was performed following the PRISMA guidelines for all publications up until February 2024. Randomised controlled trials (RCTs) that analysed the effects of exercise on any psychological constructs in any oncological population and only full-text articles published in English in peer-reviewed journals were included. All results were exported to Covidence and screened by two independent reviewers. Study quality was assessed using the Delphi list tool.

Results

A total of 6166 articles were retrieved, with 186 RCTs subsequently included in the review. The vast majority of studies included measurements of negative psychological constructs, predominantly anxiety and depression. A paucity of studies assessed positive psychological constructs such as motivation, hope and self-efficacy.

Conclusions

The current exercise oncology literature places an overemphasis on the influence of exercise on negative psychological constructs compared to positive psychological constructs. Future research should include measures of positive psychological constructs to confirm whether exercise can influence these findings.

Keywords

Psycho-oncology, psychological constructs, exercise, quality of life

Conflict of Interest & Ethical Approval

yes

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yes

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