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Workplace Health and Wellness Program: Enhancing Employee Morale via Incentives, Gym Memberships, and Fitness Trackers: A Secondary Review

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Analyze existing peer-reviewed literature to determine if employer-provided gym memberships, fitness trackers, and incentivization programs enhance employee morale.

Methods: The target population of this literature review is employees within the U.S. workforce. The researcher included articles from January 2016 to February 2021 from ScienceDirect, PubMed, and PsycINFO databases and used the STROBE checklist for *cross-sectional studies*. The researcher included 18 of the 571 articles after applying the keywords and reviewing the title, abstract, and content. The inclusion criteria included workplace health programs, gym memberships, fitness trackers, or gamification, and individuals 18 years or older. The exclusion criteria included sitting interventions, lack of rewards or incentives, and not providing gym memberships or fitness trackers.

Findings: The researcher found increased employee morale when providing gym memberships, fitness trackers, and incentive programs. However, the most successful programs were a combination of the three.

Conclusions: The author concluded that all workplaces should implement wellness programs, especially those with significant sedentary time. Moreover, the researcher found a positive correlation among employers providing employees with gym memberships, fitness trackers, and incentive programs.

Recommendations: Future research needs to evaluate the effectiveness of inclusive wellness programs providing gym memberships, fitness trackers, and incentives.

OBJECTIVES

Following literature review completion, the most effective form of providing a health and wellness program began with three objectives:

- Employers must provide gym memberships and/or onsite fitness classes that are accessible to all employees.
- Provide full or partial reimbursement of fitness trackers to increase healthy competition among employees and increase levels of movement tracking.
- Implement gamification within the health and wellness program.

BACKGROUND/INTRODUCTION

Among the American workforce is an increasingly high death rate created by a lack of movement, 50% of employees' waking hours are spent working, leading to an alarming rate of obesity, diabetes, poor mental health, and deficient physical health (Duffy et al., 2020). These rates are alarming for not only employees among the workforce but should be even more so for employers; especially during the Great Resignation that the nation is currently witnessing. Employees have shown over the past several years decreased levels of talent output, low rates of employee retention, and increased medical costs. In turn, begging the question, will discounted gym memberships, fitness trackers, and gamification practices create necessary changes within the workforce. As reported by the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), only 46.1% of all workplaces provide health and wellness programming (2017). Furthermore, employer-funded health and wellness programming have shown significant reductions among healthcare expenditure and increased employee wellness and morale (Song & Baicker, 2019).

SUMMARY BOX

What is already known: Gamification is effective for creating new behaviors. Workplace health and wellness programs are generally effective for increasing employee fitness but there is not a program that applies three specific methods for behavior modification.

What this study adds: As a result of this study, we know that workplace health and wellness programs are most effective when employees are provided gym memberships, fitness trackers, and incentivization. This study also suggests that employees supported through workplace wellness programs will allow the employer to observe increased retention rates and employee morale.

METHODS/RESULTS

The target population of this literature review is employees within the workforce in the United States. The literature review included gym memberships, fitness trackers, and incentives within health and wellness programming in the workplace. All articles were eligible based upon them being written in English and being published in 2016 and after. The literature search began in January of 2022 and was completed in March of 2022, included eighteen papers from 01/2016 to 02/2021, and utilized Psycinfo, Pubmed, and ScienceDirect. The keywords used were “exercise”, “workplace”, “fitness tracker”, “gym membership”, “health”, “wellness”, and “incentives”. Following the initial search of the literature, 571 articles were identified through a multitude of combinations with the seven keywords and filtered out through the utilization of the STROBE checklist for *cross-sectional studies*. The articles were first selected by title and abstract, and then the full text was combed through to ensure the relevance of the topic.

Procedures

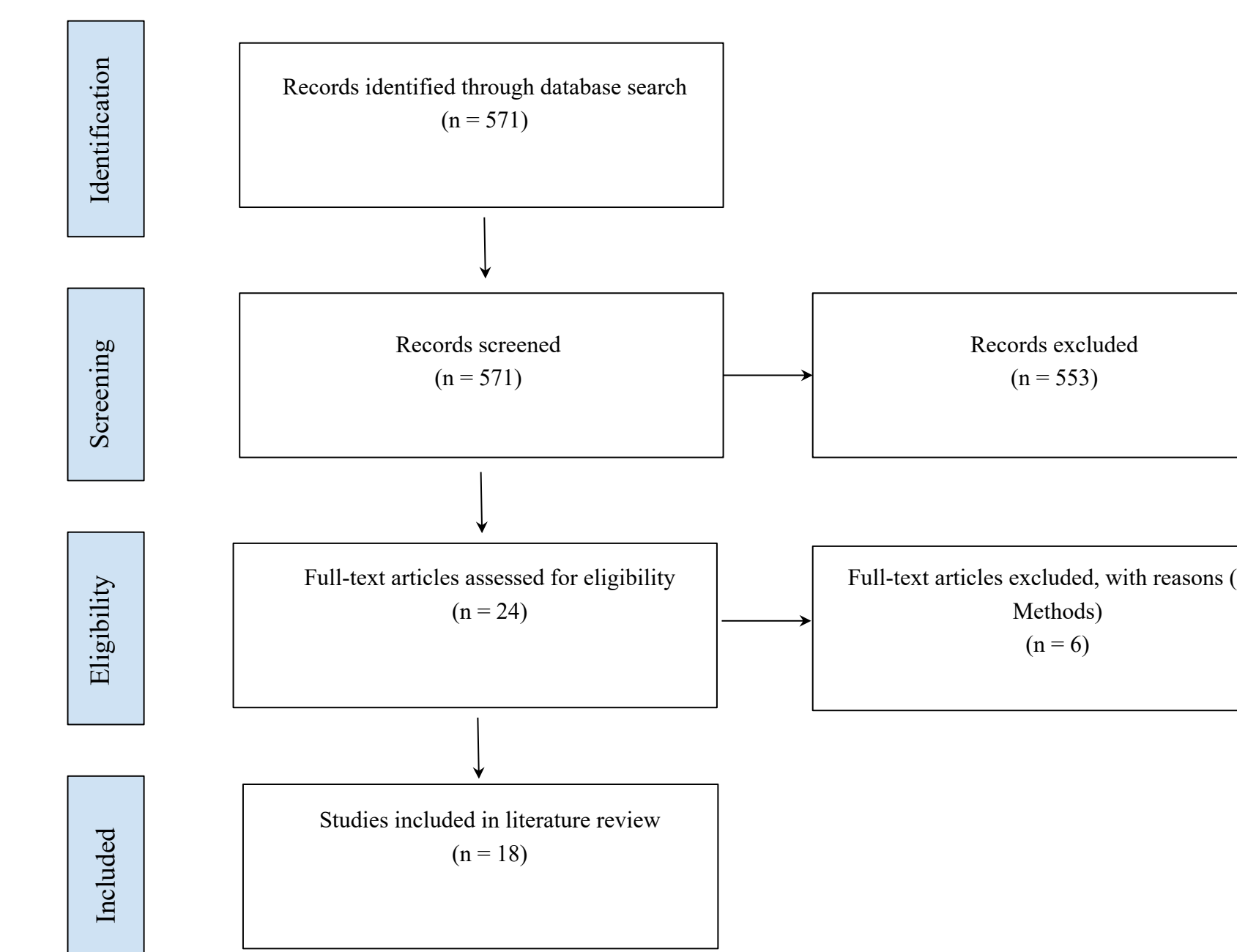


Figure 1. PRISMA flow chart for article retrieval and selection. Adapted from Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analysis (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, & Altman, 2009, as cited in, Jones & deValpine, 2021).

CONCLUSION

The author found a positive correlation when providing programming to employees through a tiered program of gym memberships, fitness trackers, and incentivization. Additionally, this literature review concluded a successful correlation between the three initial objectives. Moreover, incentive programs are proposed to be most successful when implemented on a tiered scale based upon the level of challenges the employee achieves and the more closely linked to monetary value incentives are. Implementing an employee health and wellbeing program should also include reminders and breaks via fitness tracker notifications as this successfully proved a significant decrease in sedentary time, long term. These programs have proven increased employee participation and are beneficial to the individual's physical and mental health with added benefits of being an exciting-obtainable challenge.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Employers should offer health and wellness programs to their employees, these programs should include paid for or discounted gym memberships, paid for or discounted fitness trackers, and incentivization challenges. Additional data collection should be conducted for each employer regarding various forms of incentives that will be most effective for their target population.

Future research needs to evaluate the effectiveness of inclusive wellness programs providing gym memberships, fitness trackers, and incentives.

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