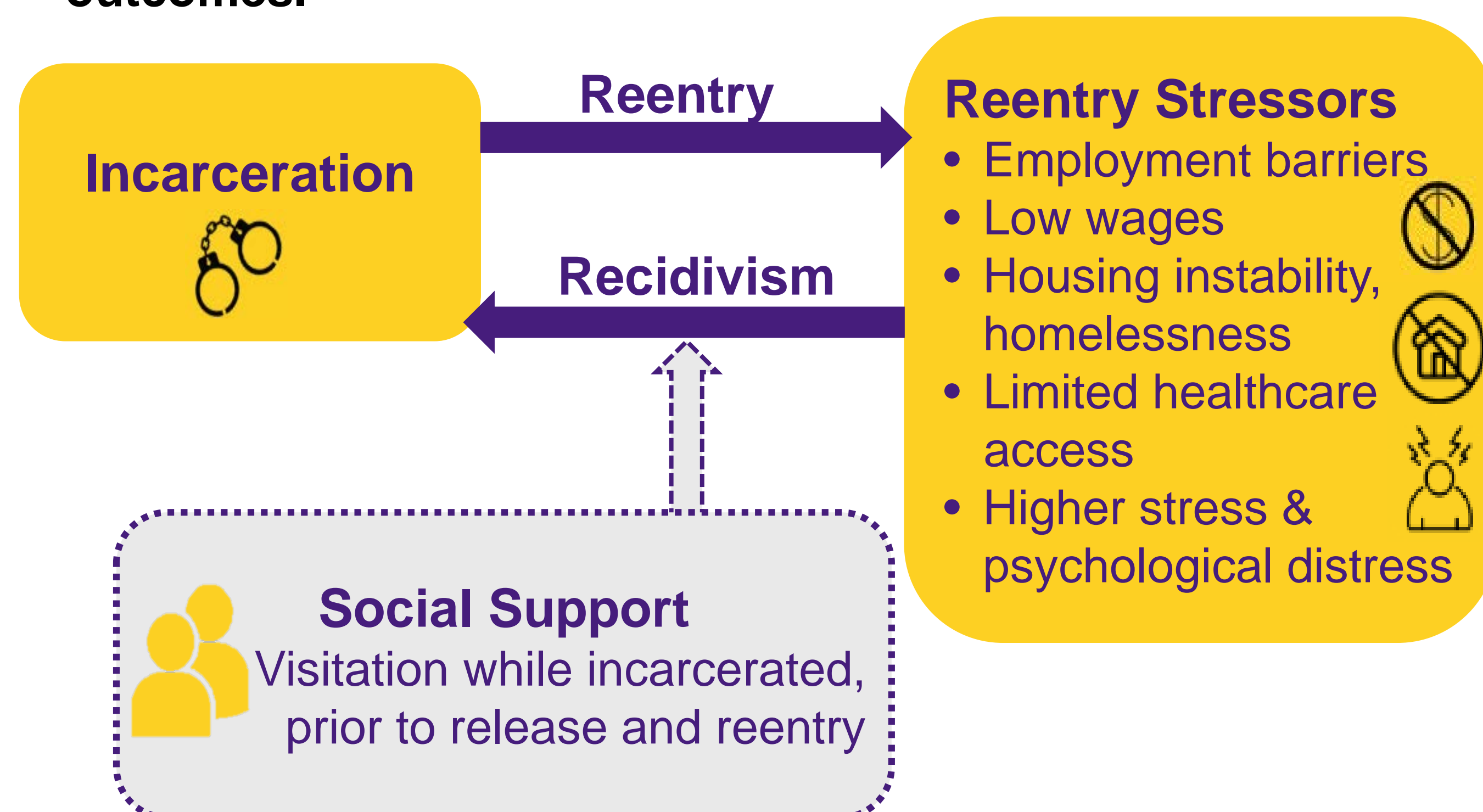


Introduction

- For those formerly incarcerated, community reentry is often faced with limited job opportunities, lower wages, and a higher risk of poverty and homelessness.¹⁻³
- These circumstances often lead to increased feelings of stress and psychological distress that may precede criminality and recidivism. They can also exacerbate current health issues and increase disease burden or mortality risk.⁴⁻⁵
- One potential solution to mediate reentry stressors includes maintaining quality connections and relationships that provide emotional and tangible social support while incarcerated. This can be in the form of visitation, letters, or phone calls prior to release that enable opportunities related to employment or housing upon reentry.⁶
- While prior studies support the associations between social support and reduced stress, improved health, and reduced recidivism rates, there is less known about the impact of social support via correctional visitation.

Systematic Review Purpose

The purpose of this review is to explore the existing literature on social support through prison and jail visitation and its relationship with recidivism and community reentry outcomes.

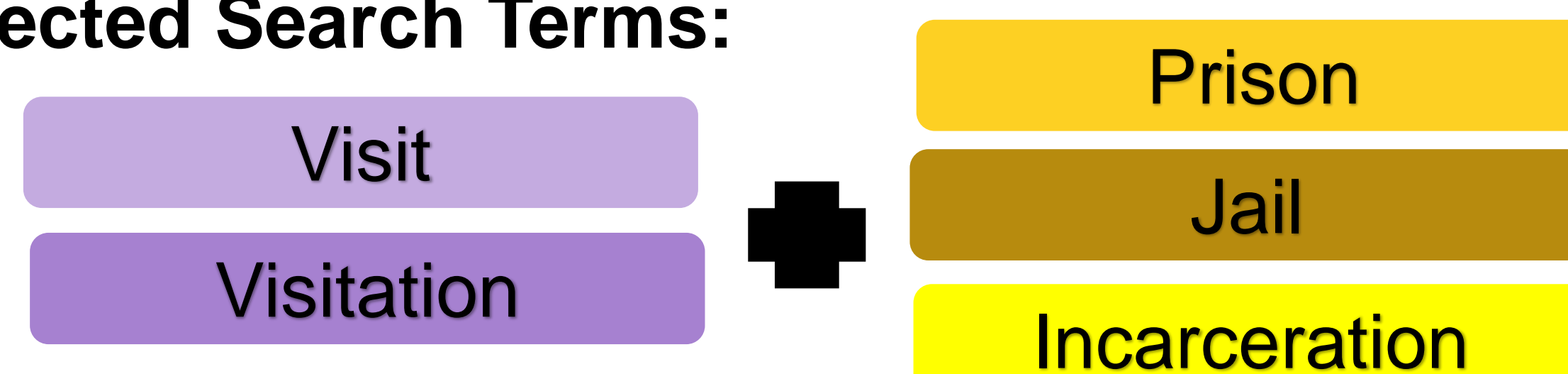


Methods

Database sources:

- CINAHL, 2. Criminal Justice Abstracts, 3. PsycINFO, 4. SCOPUS

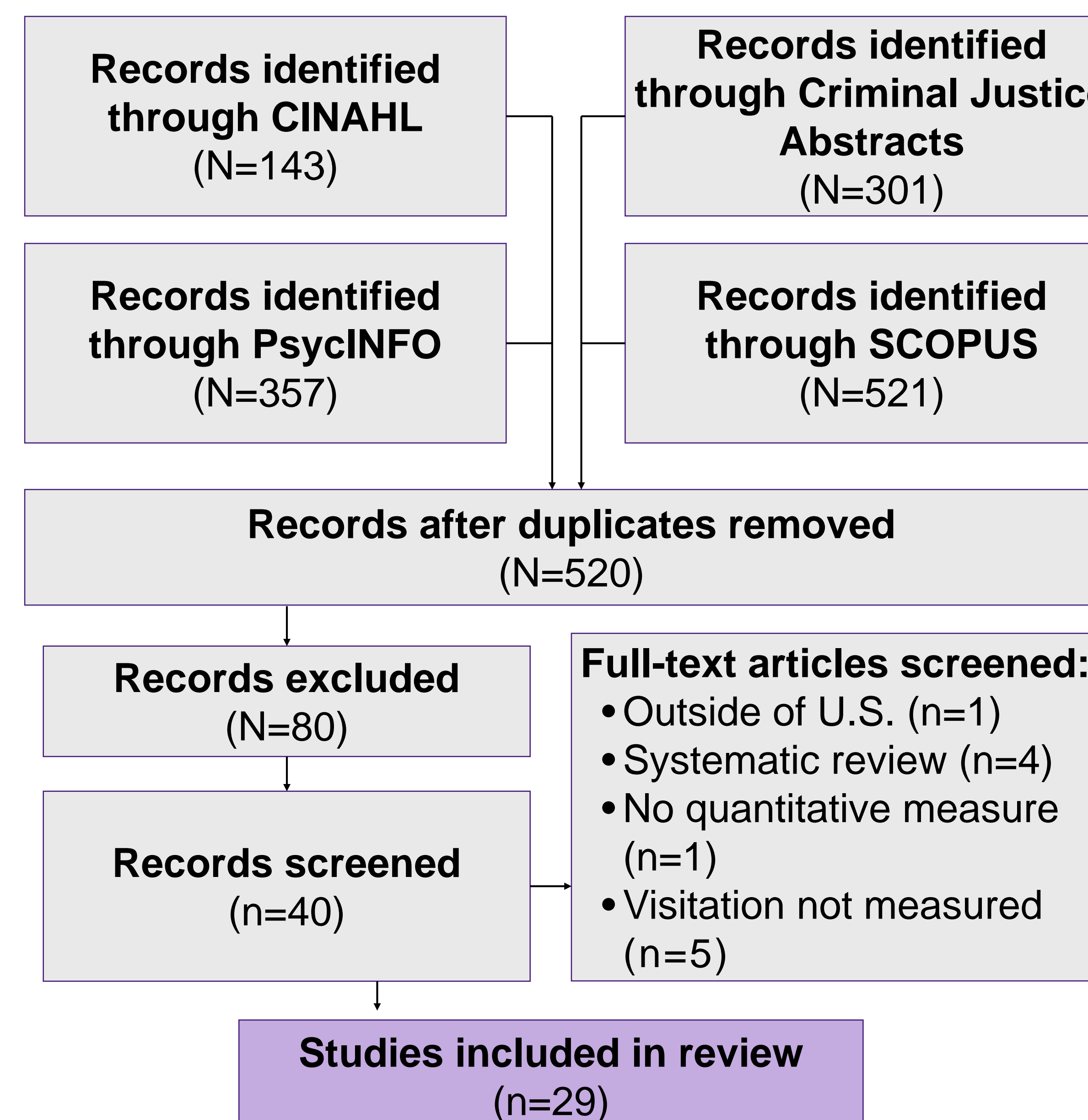
Selected Search Terms:



Inclusion criteria:

- Visitation and external prison/jail contact identified as primary predictor.
- Main outcome was reentry (recidivism or variables closely associated with recidivism like misconduct while incarcerated) or health-related.
- Study sample was 18 years or older.
- Study designs were either experimental or quasi-experimental.
- Articles written in English, describing U.S. population.
- Published after the year 2000.

Figure 1. Review Screening Process



Results

- 29 original studies were selected, with sample sizes ranging from 91 to 43,202 participants.

Study samples:

- Most consisted of majority male samples.
- 2 studies focused on incarcerated parents (1 with fathers, 1 with mothers).
- 1 study on older adults and on long-term (average sentence time was 16 years) inmates.

By design:

- 18 (62%) studies utilized official records for data; 11 (38%) used self-report surveys.
- 10 (34%) were cross-sectional studies, 19 (66%) were cohort studies.

Results

Most studies found that social support through prison and jail visitation improved overall recidivism and reentry outcomes, but in studies with additional details collected, not all correctional visitation was consistently positive:

Visits (yes/no):

Most studies found visits were negatively associated with recidivism; however, 1 study found it was positively associated with drug violations and 1 study did not report significant findings for minor misconduct.

Visitor Type:

Visits from children were positively related to parental stress levels in some studies; visits from ex-spouses increased recidivism risk; relationship type was not found significantly related to recidivism after controlling for other risk factors.

Visit Frequency:

Higher frequency of visits typically predicted significant negative relationships with recidivism, in-prison misconduct, and reentry concerns.

Visit Timing:

Visits near-prison entry, near-prison release negatively predicted recidivism/misconduct and positively predicted early parole decisions.

Variations in variable measurements for recidivism (e.g., recidivism measured by all offenses versus only felony offenses) & varying analytical approaches and methodologies sometimes affected the overall outcome.

Discussion

- The existing literature on social support via correctional visitation and its relationship with recidivism and community reentry outcomes requires further research to establish a greater reliability of evidence.
- In most studies, the majority of those incarcerated were never visited. More studies are needed to explore visitation and recidivism variables in greater detail, as well as studying potential barriers to visitation or the quality of relationships preceding incarceration.

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