

# Experiences of mental health nurses and patients of improving physical activity in mental health care: a systematic review of qualitative evidence

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## Background

Mental disorders and chronic physical diseases are growing global health concerns that lower quality of life and increase healthcare costs. The co-occurrence of mental disorders with chronic physical illnesses, commonly referred to as comorbidity, is well established in the literature. Physical activity is positively associated with improving mental health and reducing the impact of chronic comorbidities. Therefore, promoting physical activity among individuals with mental disorders is essential for improving overall health outcomes. To design effective physical activity interventions, it is crucial to understand the lived experiences of both patients and mental health nurses. Mental health nurses play a key role in supporting patients' physical activity, and their insights are vital for identifying practical barriers and facilitators in mental health care. Despite its importance, there is currently no systematic review that brings together evidence on the experiences of mental health nurses and patients with mental disorders about improving physical activity.

## Aim

This study aimed to conduct a systematic review and synthesis of the existing qualitative evidence on mental health nurses' and patients' experiences towards improving physical activity. The objectives of the review are:

- To explore barriers and facilitators experienced by psychiatric patients about improving physical activity in mental health services.
- To identify barriers and facilitators experienced by mental health nurses when providing mental health care to improve the physical activity of psychiatric patients.

## Methods

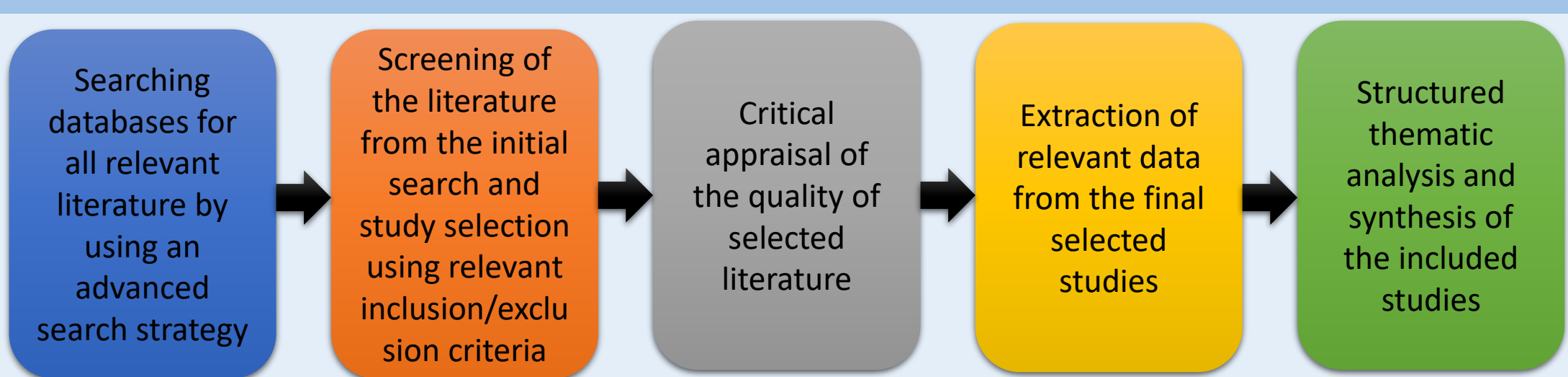


Figure 1: The flowchart above outlines the steps of the systematic review process.

Table 1. The search strategy with the SPIDER framework includes keywords and search terms with BOOLEAN terms

SPIDER Tool	Search Terms	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
S (SAMPLE)	mental illness OR mental disorder* OR "severe mental illness" OR "serious mental illness" OR mental health nurse OR "psychiatric nurs*" OR "mental health clinician" OR "nurse prac*" OR "nurse clinicians" OR "nurse specialists" OR "community health nursing" OR "healthcare workers"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Primary research that used qualitative and/or mixed-method methodology exploring the experiences of mental health nurses and patients with mental disorders about improving physical activity.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Not written English</li><li>Literature reviews of all kinds, opinions, book reviews, or commentaries</li><li>Grey literature</li><li>People younger than 18 years of age</li></ul>
P of I (Phenomenon of Interest)	physical activity OR "exercise" OR physical health OR "promoting physical activity" OR improving physical activity OR sedentary OR "healthy lifestyle" OR "sedentary behavior" OR "risk reduction behavior" OR "health promotion"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Adults (aged 18 years and over) diagnosed with mental health disorders</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Quantitative studies</li><li>Not include clear qualitative research or data</li></ul>
D (Design)	data collection OR qualitative OR "mixed*" OR "interview*" OR "focus group*" OR "observ*" OR "survey*" OR "stories" OR "questionnaire" OR "narrative" OR "grounded theory" OR "ethnography" OR "phenomenology" OR "content analysis" OR "thematic analysis" OR "case stud*"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Nurses that qualified with at least an undergraduate degree</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Not focused on physical activity/exercise</li><li>Theses and Dissertations</li><li>Other healthcare professionals (eg. Physiotherapist, occupational therapist, physicians)</li></ul>
E (Evaluation)	experience* OR "attitude to health" OR "attitude*" OR "view*" OR "feeling" OR "opinion*" OR "behavio*" OR "perspective*" OR "perception*" OR "think*" OR "thought*" OR "need*" OR "belie*" OR "attitude of health" OR "health" OR "practice" OR "health behavior" OR "health education" OR "know*" OR "personnel" OR "perce*" OR "feel*" OR "facilitators" OR "barriers"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Primary studies were published between 2000 to 2024 with complete texts available on databases.</li></ul>	
R (Research Type)	Mixed-method* OR "qualitative research"		

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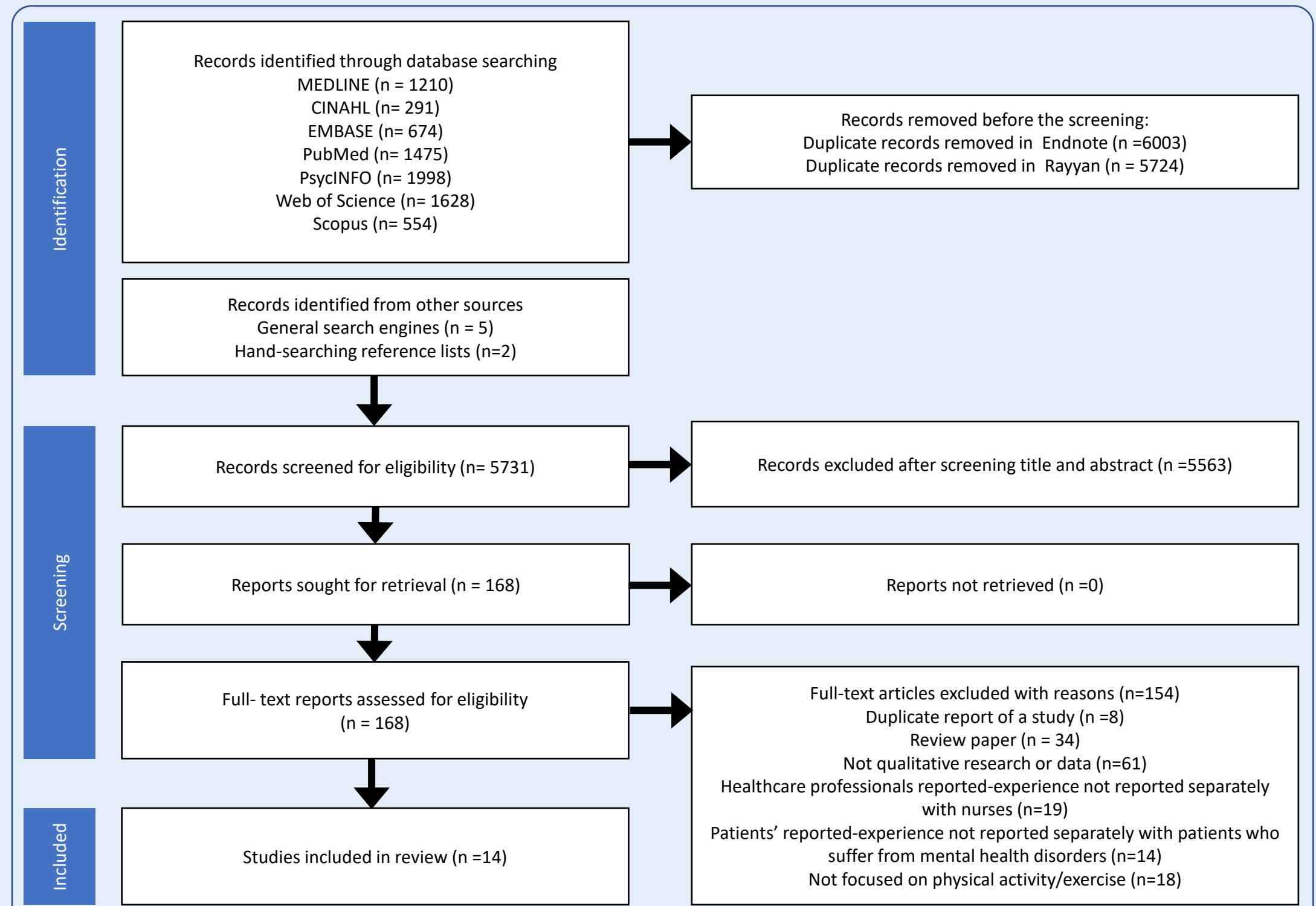


Figure 2: PRISMA flow diagram of the literature search and research article selection process

## Results

14 studies were included in the review, 10 articles focused on patients' experiences and attitudes, and 4 articles include mental health nurses' experiences. It is important to note that across the literature, there were overlaps of themes within studies, however, there were no articles that encompassed all themes.

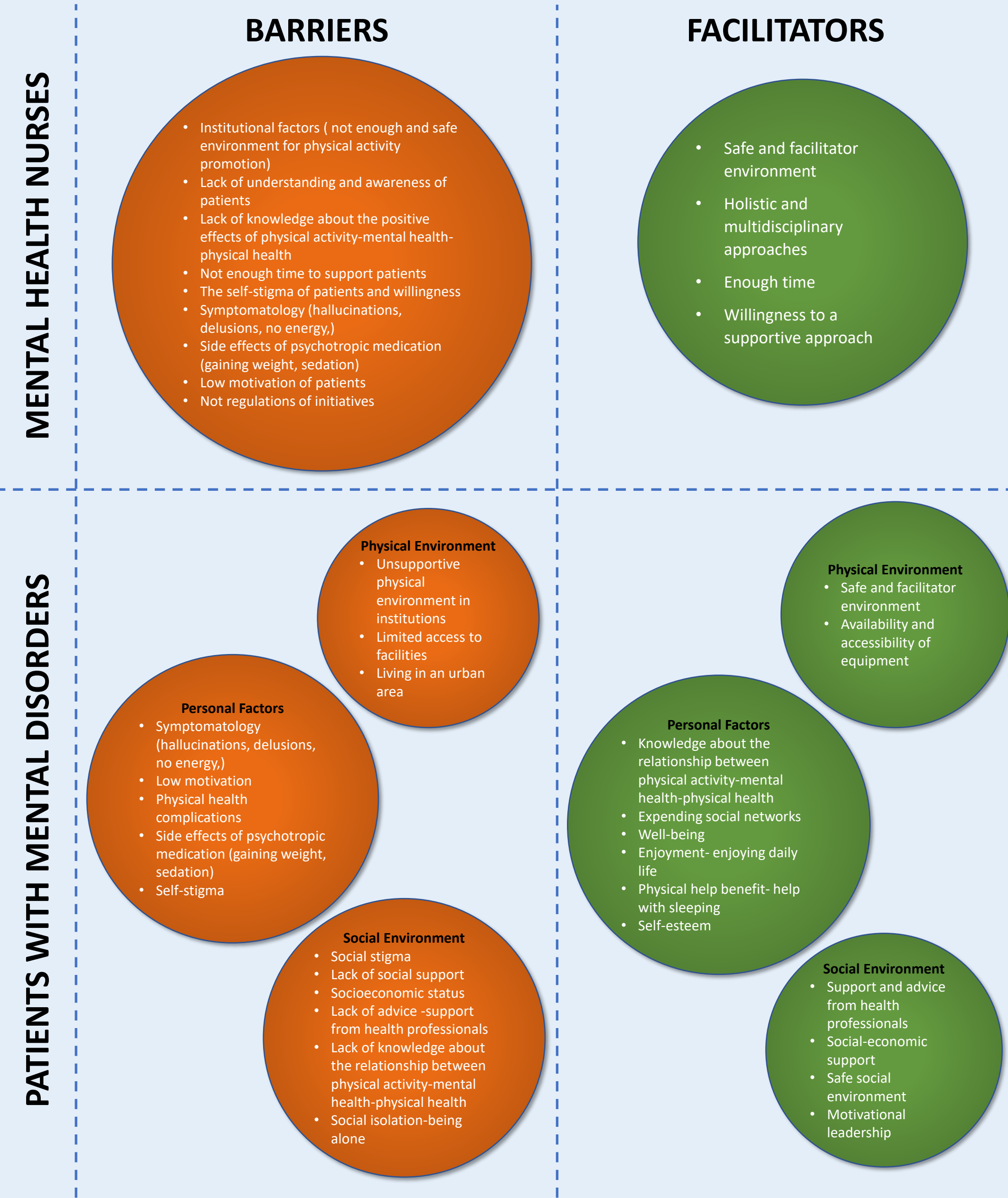


Figure 3: Diagram illustrating the themes

## Conclusion

This systematic review is the first to identify, appraise and synthesise the existing qualitative research on barriers and facilitators experienced by psychiatric patients and mental health nurses about improving physical activity. Our findings bring to light a complex interaction between the facilitators and barriers perceived by patients and mental health nurses to improve physical activity. Further research on the effect of individualised patient education, psychological interventions, and arrangements of institutions that provide mental health services, regulations of mental health services to support exercise engagement, and lifestyle change initiatives in individuals with mental health disorders is required.

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