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Social Determinants of Health and COVID-19: A review of the literature

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Background

- The social determinants of health are defined as “the conditions in places where people live, learn, work, and play.”¹ For centuries, social determinants of health have impacted the quality of life and health of human beings
- Socially disadvantaged people are physically, mentally, and socially more vulnerable to infectious disease. This creates health inequality which produces conditions for the transmission of infectious disease thus, contributing to an unequal burden of morbidity and mortality²
- As of March 3, 2021 there have been about 114 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 and over 2.5 million deaths worldwide reported to the WHO
- Social determinants of health have been identified in literature specifically during the COVID-19 pandemic to affect incidence and mortality rates

Purpose

To identify the recent evidence of specific social determinants of health within the context of the pandemic that are important to consider for prevention of the spread of infectious diseases, specifically COVID-19. This will be vital to long term success reducing health disparities, health inequity, morbidity, and mortality

Methods

SEARCH STRATEGY:

- PubMed was used to search for empirical research evaluating the relationship of social determinants of health and COVID-19 published since 2019
- Search terms were:
 - “COVID-19” or
 - “CORONAVIRUS” or
 - “2019-nCoV” or
 - “SARS” or ‘MERS” and
 - “social determinants of health”

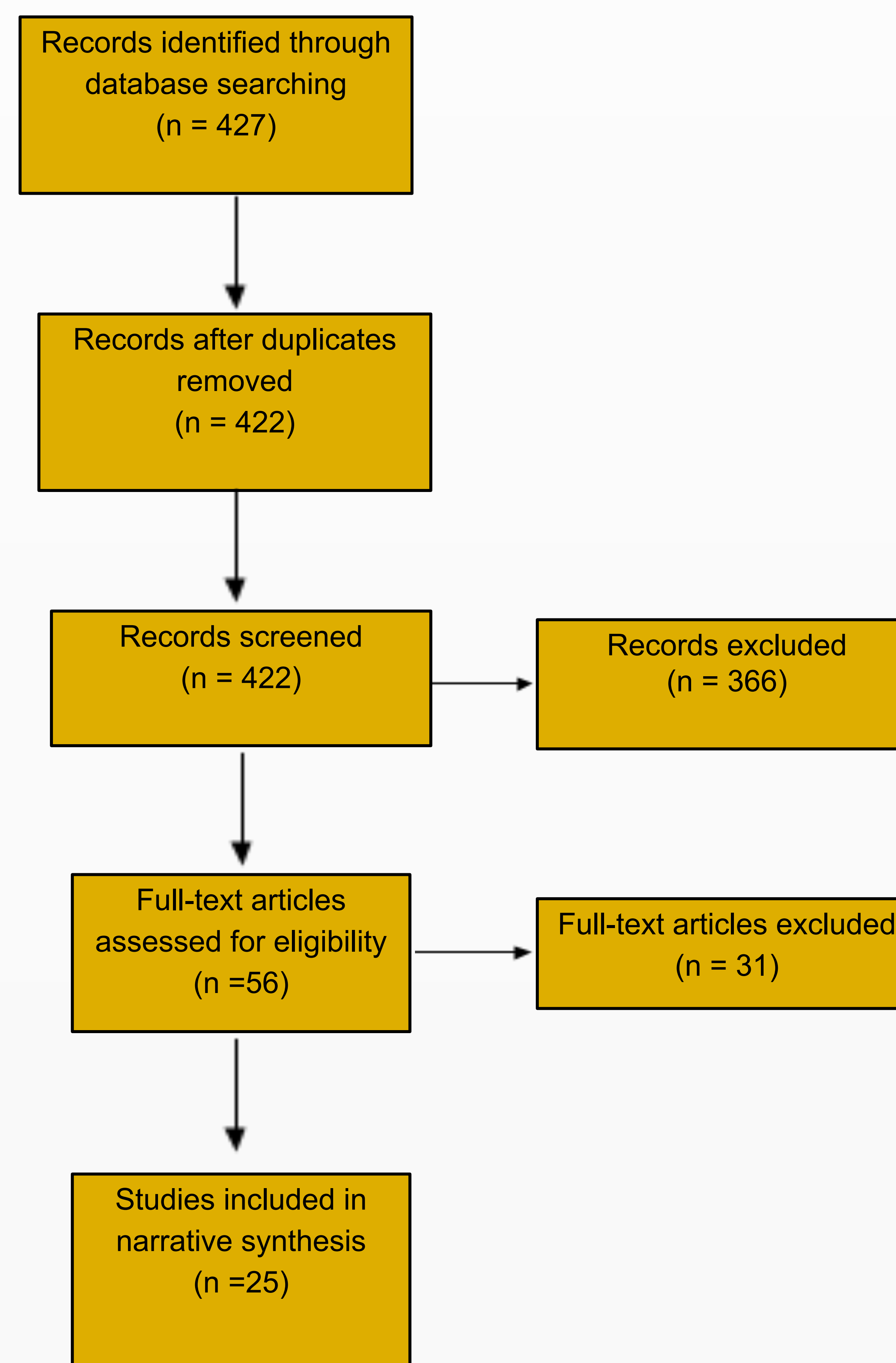
Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
English language	Editorials
Peer-reviewed	Commentary
Published since 2019	Opinion-based

Social Determinants of Health



Healthy People 2030, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Retrieved 3/1/21, from <https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/social-determinants-health>

Prisma Flow Diagram



Results

Education

- Lower level education (i.e., less than a high school diploma) was prevalent in communities with incredibly high rates of COVID-19³
- Lower level education was also found to be associated with higher COVID-19 death rates⁴

Employment

- 50% of college students reported that their employment was directly impacted by the pandemic⁵
- 42% of participants still expressed concern about their employment due to the uncertain nature of the pandemic⁶
- Incidence rate was positively associated with those who spend >1 hour to reach their place of work and the percentage of employed persons aged ≥18 in the city⁷

Income

- Those with very low median household income had financial difficulties purchasing basic needs (e.g., medicine, food)⁸
- Both individual and median household income were significant predictors of COVID-19 incidence⁸
- Affluent neighborhoods were associated with significantly lower case rates and neighborhood poverty was associated with elevated COVID-19 deaths⁹

Mental Health Consequences

- 1 in 4 people reported having experienced a strong emotional impact, with rising anxiety and depression levels¹⁰
- Around 25% stated that their anxiety would lead to limitations in their daily life¹⁰
- Lack of socialization and loss of human connection is likely to lead to depression¹¹

Conclusions

- Across all studies it was evident that social determinants of health have had a significant influence on the rates of COVID-19 cases and mortality
- The literature confirms that all individuals are not equally at risk for COVID-19¹²
- Consistent patterns noted throughout the current literature included access to healthcare, education, crowded housing, poverty, unemployment, being an essential worker or coming from a diverse racial/ethnic background
- Social determinants of health need to be a part of pandemic research priorities because there is potential to reduce future pandemic morbidity and mortality

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