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# Occupational therapy-led interventions for people with anxiety disorders

## Impact on functioning and mental health symptoms

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Anxiety is prevalent and is associated with loss of functioning in occupations like work and household management (Kessler et al., 2009). But the effectiveness of occupational therapy interventions to improve functioning for this population was under-researched. This systematic review aimed to determine the effectiveness of occupational therapy interventions to improve functioning and mental health outcomes for individuals with anxiety disorders.

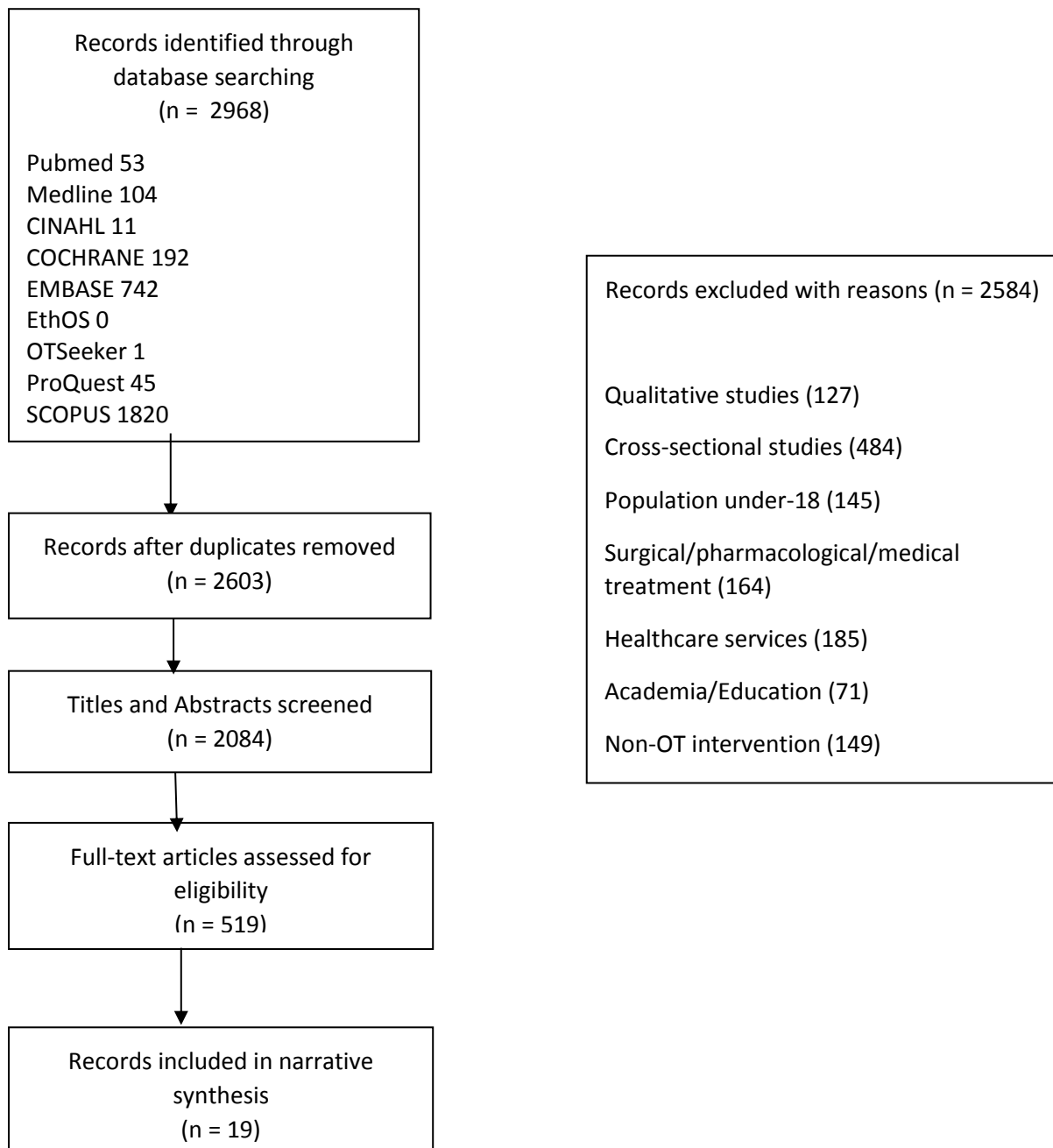
The systematic review included studies involving (a) individuals with anxiety and stress-related disorders over 18 years, (b) outcomes relating to functioning and/or mental health and (c) interventions designed/led/facilitated by an occupational therapist. Eleven databases were searched for literature published from 1994 – December 2017. Data extraction was performed by the first author and independently reviewed by the other authors. The studies were critically appraised for methodological quality (Law & MacDermid, 2014).

The review found 19 papers describing 13 individual studies. Because the nature of the interventions varied, narrative analysis was used rather than meta-analysis. Interventions were clustered into discrete categories depending on the underpinning theory of the intervention, namely (i) cognitive-behavioural theory, (ii) lifestyle modification, (iii) skill-building, (iv) the ValMO model (Persson, Erlandsson, Eklund, & Iwarsson, 2001) and (v) neurological and sensory. Interventions using lifestyle modification (Lambert et al., 2007), the ValMO model (Eklund & Erlandsson, 2011) and skill-building (Helfrich, Peters, & Chan, 2011) showed the potential for effectiveness in improving both anxiety symptoms and daily functioning.

Many reviewed studies were small and uncontrolled, indicating an urgency for high quality research in this area. Occupational therapy interventions have the potential to improve functioning and mental health outcomes for people with anxiety, but interventions require replication and larger-scale research to demonstrate the added value of occupational therapy (Ashby, Gray, Ryan, & James, 2015).

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**Papers included in the final review, clustered by theoretical underpinning:**

***Interventions using cognitive-behavioural theory***

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- Prior, S. (1998a). Anxiety Management: Results of a Follow-Up Study. *British Journal of Occupational Therapy, 61*(6), 284-285.
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***Interventions using lifestyle modification theory***

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***Interventions using skill-building theory (specifically for those with PTSD or trauma)***

- Classen, S., Cormack, N. L., Winter, S. M., Monahan, M., Yarney, A., Lutz, A. L., & Platek, K. (2014). Efficacy of an occupational therapy driving intervention for returning combat veterans. *OTJR Occupation, Participation and Health, 34*(4), 176-182.
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***Interventions using occupational science theory (the ValMO model)***

- Eklund, M. (2013). Anxiety, depression, and stress among women in work rehabilitation for stress-related disorders. *International Journal of Mental Health, 42*(4), 34-47. doi: 10.2753/imh0020-7411420402
- Eklund, M., & Erlandsson, L.-K. (2011). Return to work outcomes of the Redesigning Daily Occupations (ReDO) program for women with stress-related disorders—A comparative study. *Women & Health, 51*(7), 676-692.
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### ***Interventions using neurological/sensory theories***

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