

PERCEPTION AND COMMUNICATION OF HEALTH RISK IN SUBSTANCE DEPENDENCE POPULATIONS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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Introduction and Aims: The substance dependence population are at greater risk of chronic diseases due to their unhealthy lifestyle behaviours. There is increasing evidence that health risk communication is crucial in improving risk perception and knowledge of chronic diseases, and both factors are associated with health behaviour change. The aim of this systematic review was to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of evidence on health risk communication to people with substance dependence.

Design and Methods: We conducted a systematic search and identified empirical sources from the databases MEDLINE, PsycINFO, CINAHL, and Scopus for all publications preceding January 2019. Data was extracted from the included studies and a narrative synthesis of the results was conducted.

Results: Eight articles, representing 6 unique studies, were included in the review. The studies evaluated various types of health risk communication across smoking cessation, illicit drug use, and HIV risk behaviours outcome measures. Health risk was communicated via an array of methods, which included telephone counselling, videos, handouts and group sessions. Results from individual studies revealed that message framing, specifically gain-framed messages, and psychoeducation had a positive impact on smoking cessation and HIV risk behaviours and knowledge. Risk perception was also found to be associated with smoking cessation.

Discussions and Conclusions: The limited number of studies provided some evidence that health risk communication promotes smoking cessation. However, studies included in the review were characterised by heterogeneous methods, therefore the superiority of any single method for communicating health risk was not established. Further investigation of health risk communication using good quality, RCTs are warranted.

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