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Promoting research transparency - Interventions to improve the publication and dissemination of trial evidence: A scoping review

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Authors	Hohlfeld, A;Kredo, T;Clarke, M
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INTERVENTIONS TO IMPROVE THE PUBLICATION AND DISSEMINATION OF TRIAL EVIDENCE: A SCOPING REVIEW

Authors: Ameer Hohlfeld^{1,2}, Tamara Kreda^{1,2,3}, Michael Clarke^{1,4}

¹ Division of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Stellenbosch University, South Africa

² Cochrane South Africa, South African Medical Research Council, Cape Town, South Africa;

³ Division of Clinical Pharmacology, Department of Medicine and Division of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Department of Global Health, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Stellenbosch University, South Africa

⁴ Northern Ireland Methodology Hub, Centre for Public Health, Queen's University Belfast, BT12 6BJ, United Kingdom

BACKGROUND

The World Health Organization recommends that a randomised controlled trial (RCT) should have results published in a peer-reviewed journal within 24 months of study completion. Globally, between 25% and 50% of trials remain unpublished. When RCTs are not published, we define this as publication bias. However, it is unclear which interventions

may best mitigate publication bias. Therefore, we undertook to systematically synthesise literature on implemented interventions targeting researchers that were intended to reduce publication bias among health science researchers.

METHODS

We sought studies of interventions to help people in the health science field to publish their research findings, regardless of the type of research. We searched PubMed and Scopus in March 2022 using words related to interventions AND publishing (e.g. "publication bias", "trial*", "publication*", "publish", etc) without any date or language restrictions. We also used forward citation searches to identify articles that had cited eligible studies.

After removing duplicates, we independently screened titles and abstracts and retrieved potentially eligible full-text articles, which were assessed for final inclusion and data extraction of the year of publication, study objectives, which the intervention was directed to, type of intervention, how it was implemented and important study outcomes.

RESULTS

After de-duplication, we screened titles and abstracts for 10,589 records from the searches of PubMed and Scopus. We assessed 21 full texts for eligibility. One study met the eligibility criteria. Our forward and backward citation searches yielded 57 records, of which four were unobtainable, and ten did not meet eligibility criteria. We included 44 studies describing interventions promoting publishing in health-related research (Fig 1). None of our studies included trial researchers. Most studies are conducted in high-income countries, primarily the USA (Fig 2).

We found ten broad interventions that supported the writing of research for publishing (Table 1). We grouped these into structured programmes, facilitator-led programmes, writing retreats and software-based interventions. Structured programmes included programs, workshops, and writing courses. Facilitator-led interventions included writing mentors, groups, peer support, and medical writers. We frequently found structured programmes combined with facilitator-led programmes.

CONCLUSIONS

Although we found writing interventions to support researchers in publishing, none of these targeted trialists. Trialists may face challenges that our eligible studies have not addressed. Trialists may lack support from research staff due to contracts ending or require support with reporting and analysing data.

Researchers may be unaware of the ethical responsibility of publishing research findings and the negative impact of publication bias on evidence-based healthcare decision-making. Future interventions should consider addressing publication bias as a central theme.

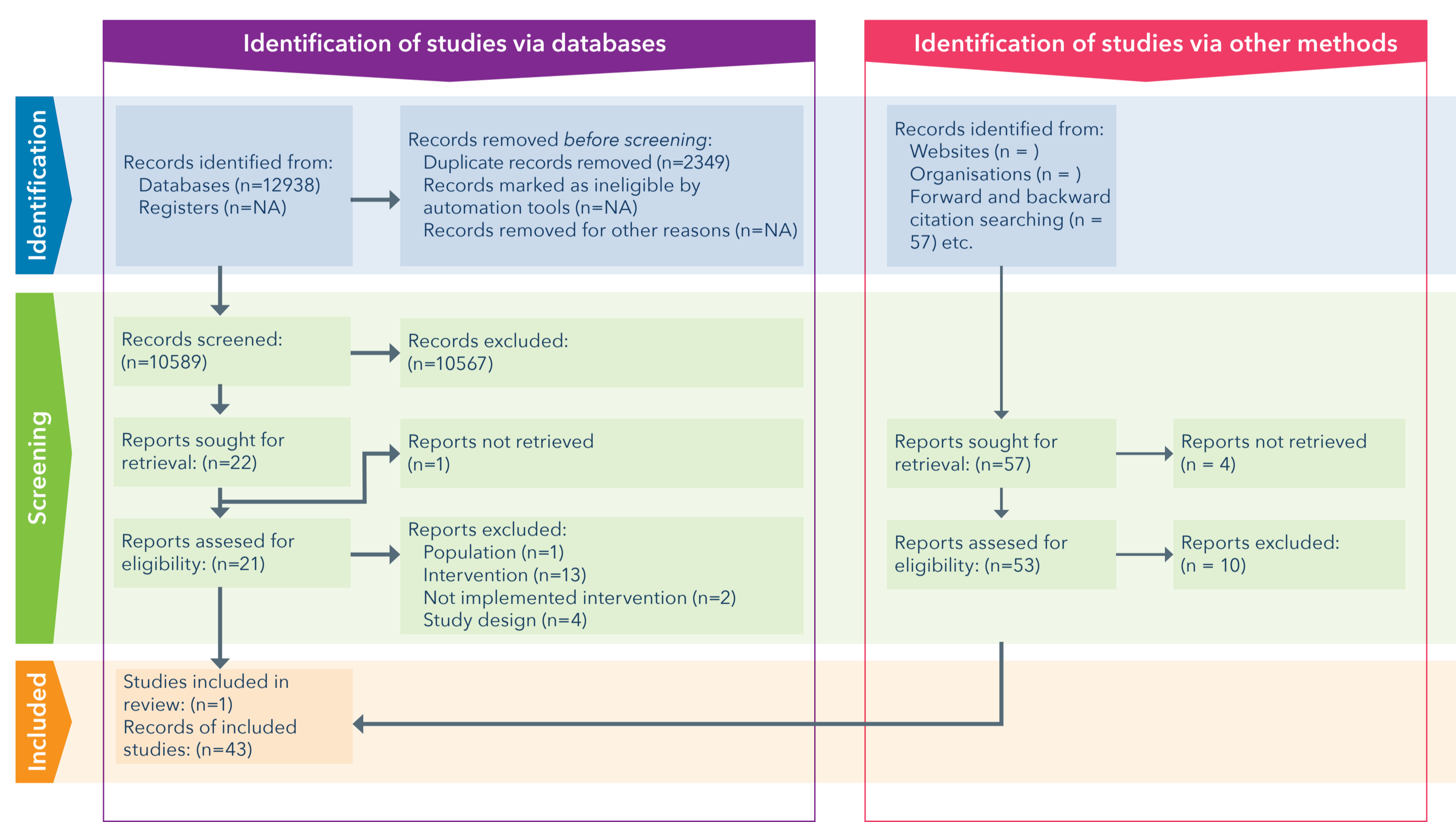


Figure 1 Prisma
From: Page MJ, McKenzie JE, Bossuyt PM, Boutron I, Hoffmann TC, Mulrow CD, et al. The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ* 2021;372:n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71. For more information, visit: <http://www.prisma-statement.org/>

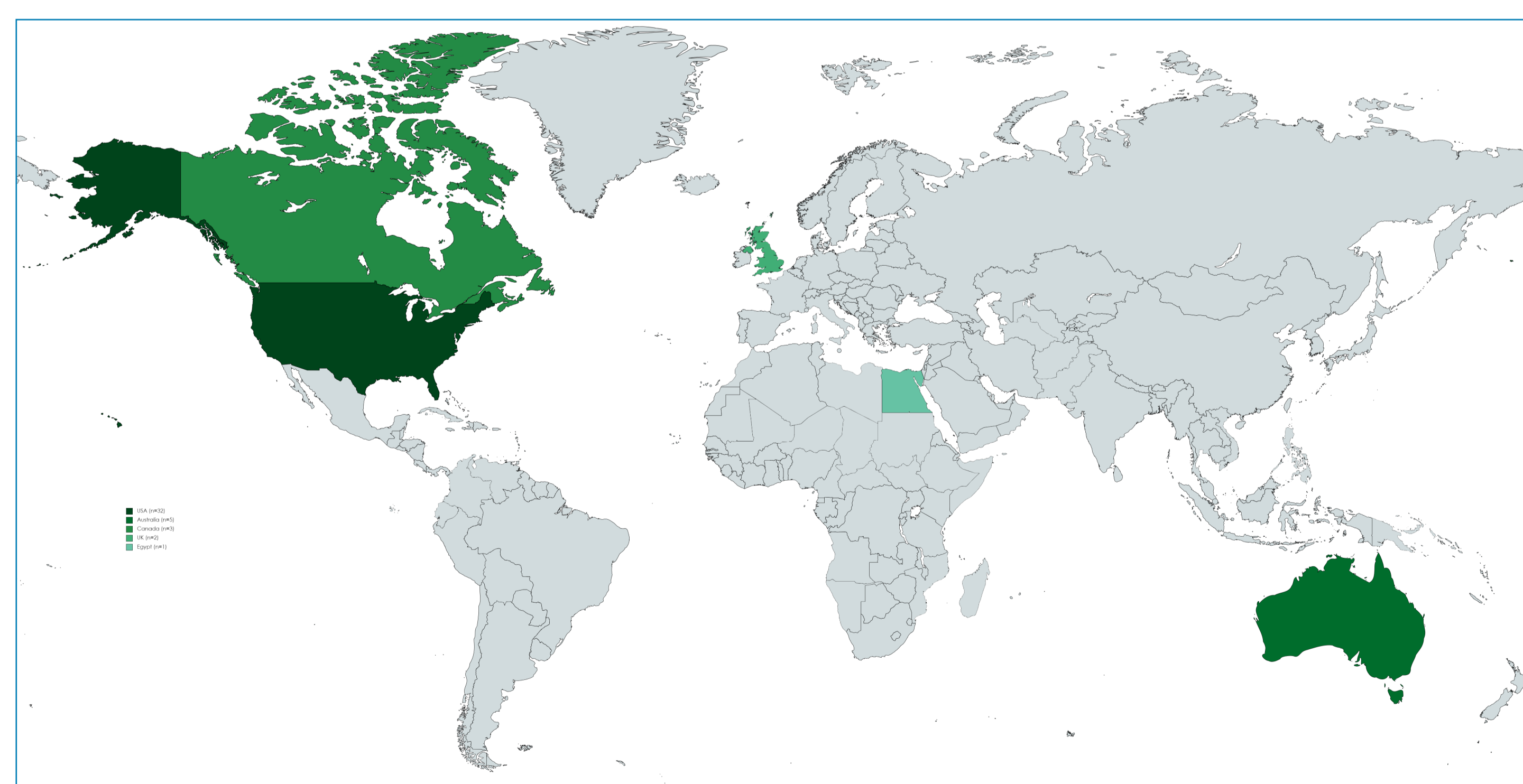


Figure 2 Countries with published interventions

Table 1 Intervention summary

Author name	Program	Workshop	Group	Mentoring	Peer-support	Group Peer-support	Medical Editor	Writing Course	Retreat	Software
Al-Imari L (2016)	X					X				
Arrazola J (2020)		X		X	X					
Bellicoso D (2022)		X								
Bourgault AM (2022)									X	
Brandon C (2015)						X				
Buffington A (2021)		X								
Cable CT (2013)				X					X	
Cope VC (2016)				X		X			X	
Dankoski M (2012)		X								
Duncanson K (2018)	X				X					
Files JA (2008)	X			X			X			
Fischer-Carlidge E (2020)	X			X						
Fleming LW (2017)			X	X	X					
Franks AM (2018)	X				X					
Harris S (2003)		X	X				X			
Harvey D (2020)	X									
Hekelman FP (1995)	X				X		X			
Jackson D (2009)				X	X				X	
Kooker BM (2015)	X			X		X				
Kulage KM (2016)		X				X				
Kwan PP (2021)				X		X			X	
Murray R (2008)	X				X					
Ness V (2014)	X		X		X					
Noone J (2019)				X	X				X	
Oakley M (2012)	X			X						
Oshiro J (2020)		X								
Pololi L (2004)	X			X	X		X			
Pololi LH (2015)	X		X	X						
Reader S (2015)		X				X			X	
Remein CD (2022)		X			X					
Rickard CM (2009)	X					X		X		
Ross RG (2016)	X					X				
Sabouni A (2017)	X			X						
Salas-Lopez D (2012)			X				X			
Santucci AK (2008)				X		X				
Shah J (2010)										X
Sommers PS (1996)		X							X	
Sonnad SS (2011)	X		X		X				X	
Stanley IH (2017)						X				
Steinert Y (2008)	X	X				X				
Vogt M (2021)	X				X					
Von Isenburg M (2017)	X			X		X	X		X	
Weiss BD (2022)						X	X			
Wortman-Wunder E (2022)		X								
Total	20	12	6	16	13	14	7	1	10	1