

What's in a Name? Exploring the Shift from 'Challenging Behaviour' to 'Behaviours That Challenge' or Alternative terms



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Background

The term challenging behaviour has been in use for at least three decades and was aimed at bringing about a shift in perception and practice that would emphasise severely problematic or socially unacceptable behaviours as posing a challenge to carers, professionals and services (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2016). In recent years there appears to be inconsistency in use of language with a variety of terms in existence.

Aim

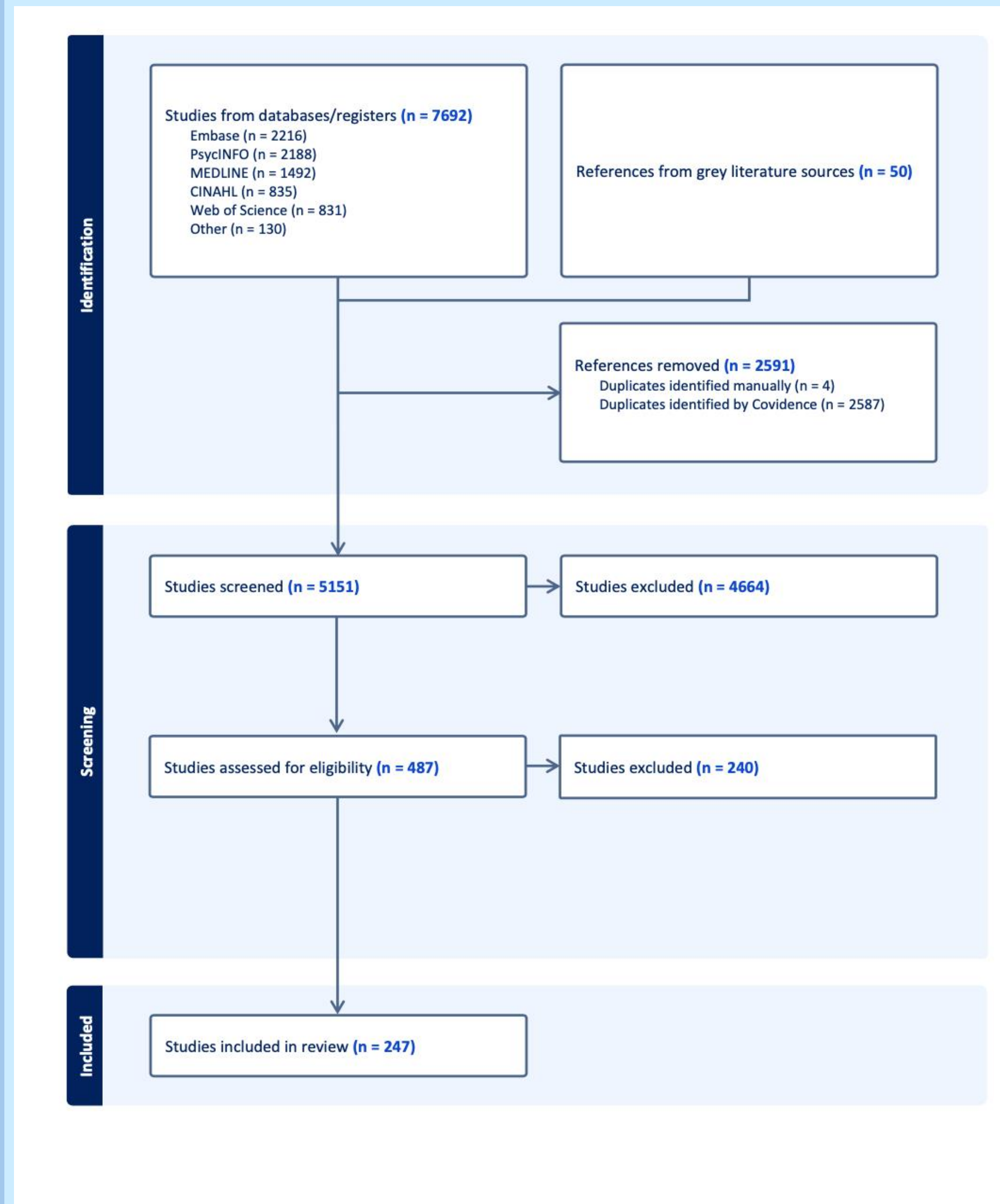
The aim of this presentation is to explore the use of the term 'challenging behaviour' and alternative terms. This work formed part of a scoping review exploring the factors that may lead to development of behaviours that challenge and prevention and management of crisis situations among CYA with disability, more specifically intellectual disability and autism.

Methods

- The scoping review methodology used, included searches in specific online databases: EMBASE (Elsevier), CINAHL (EBSCO), MEDLINE (EBSCO), PsycInfo (EBSCO) and Web of Science (Clarivate).
- Grey literature was also considered.
- The eligibility criteria for inclusion were designed using the Joanna Briggs manual of scoping review methodology, consisting of Population, Concept, Context, and Study Design (Pollock et al. 2021).

Inclusion Criteria	Description
Population	Population of interest are children and young adults with disability, specifically autism and/or intellectual disability which may be accompanied by a mental illness.
Concept	The concept of interest is the factors that lead to development of behaviours that challenge and prevention and management of crisis situations.
Context	The context is that many of these children and young people demonstrate behaviours that challenge possibly due to mental health related issues, stressors related to school, family life or other issues. Note: Studies that focus on young people who have mental illness only are excluded.
Study design	Study designs for inclusion are review articles, editorials, guidelines, quantitative and qualitative research designs, grey literature.

PRISMA Diagram



Terminology

Term	Frequency
Challenging behaviour/s	n=45
Behaviour/al problems	n=33
Problem behaviour/s	n=22
Behaviours that challenge	n=15
Disruptive behaviour/s	n=12
Behaviours of concern/s	n=6
Behavioural disturbance/s	n=2
Behaviour/al difficulties	n=1
Difficult behaviour/s	n=1
Behaviour/al dysregulation	n=1
Disruptive symptoms	n=1
Distressed behaviour	n=1
Unpredictable behaviour	n=1
Irritability	n=1
Conduct problems	n=1

Key Findings

- In reviewing the literature, the most commonly used phrase was challenging behaviour/s.
- Interestingly, much of the literature failed to define what was meant by the term used.
- Therefore, the appropriateness of the terms adopted in the reviewed literature could not be established.
- However, an assessment of the terms adopted in papers was undertaken.
- A total 149 of the 247 papers adopted terms to describe behaviour that challenges, 46 of which provided definition for the term.

Discussion

Emerson (1995) initially defined **challenging behaviour** as: *Culturally abnormal behaviour(s) of such an intensity, frequency or duration that the physical safety of the person or others is likely to be placed in serious jeopardy, or behaviour which is likely to seriously limit use of, or result in the person being denied access to, ordinary community facilities.*

Challenges still exist in using this term with it poorly understood by some and a tendency to use it as a diagnostic label locating the problem or challenge solely with the individual.

The frequent use of personal pronouns and verbs (such as 'his challenging behaviour' or 'she has challenging behaviour'), imply that the problem is within the person.

Therefore, it is important to recognise that 'challenging behaviour' is rather the result of an interaction between the person and their environment, and as such is largely socially constructed.

For an individual's behaviour to be viewed as challenging, a judgement is being made that this behaviour is dangerous, frightening, distressing or annoying and that these feelings, invoked in others, are in some way intolerable, overwhelming, or seen as inappropriate.

The impact on others, and therefore the characteristics of the observer, should be incorporated in the application and understanding of the term.

The emphasis on challenging behaviour or alternative terms needs to see the responsibility for change being with the systems around the individual.

Conclusion

While challenging behaviour is the most frequently cited term within the literature, there is inconsistency in use of language. It is evident that language used can shape individuals' thoughts, beliefs and emotions and can influence wider society (Chan et al., 2012). Therefore, taking cognisance of the NICE guidelines (NICE 2015) and the NDA guidance on disability language and terminology (NDA 2022) and what is deemed acceptable person-centred terminology by individuals, the term 'behaviours that challenge' is preferred as an alternative.