

SATISFACTION OF EUROPEAN PHYSICIANS - STATE OF THE EVIDENCE ACROSS EUROPEAN UNION COUNTRIES



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BACKGROUND

Physician satisfaction could be studied from three dimensions: (1) job - as the satisfaction with the current job, (2) work - as the satisfaction with the content of the work performed, and (3) career - as the satisfaction with the overall career trajectory over time. Despite the wide range of studies concerning physician satisfaction in different European countries, there is a lack of literature reviews synthesizing and analysing current evidence evaluating satisfaction of physicians working in European hospitals. The main objectives of our research were to examine existing literature concerning the level of physician satisfaction in European Union hospitals and provide a general overview of studies in this field and their results. We sought to systematically review the available evidence and estimate the current state of physician satisfaction in Europe.

METHODS

We searched several databases, including: MEDLINE, Embase, PsycINFO, CINAHL and the Cochrane Library from January 2000 to January 2017 including both MESH/Emtree terms and free text words related to the subject with no language restrictions. The eligibility criteria included: (1) target population: physicians working in European hospitals, (2) quantitative research aimed at assessing physician satisfaction, (3) validated tools. The study protocol of our research was registered in the International prospective register of systematic reviews (PROSPERO). Two independent reviewers assessed the methodological quality of each study using Critical Appraisal of a Survey checklist developed by the Centre for Evidence-Based Management. We performed a narrative synthesis and meta-analysis.

RESULTS

8,585 abstracts and 368 full text articles were independently screened by two reviewers against inclusion/exclusion criteria. Finally 61 studies were eligible for qualitative analysis (Fig.1). Included studies enrolled a total of 50,001 physicians from 17 countries. The majority of the analysed research was conducted in Germany (13 studies), Sweden (7), the United Kingdom (6), Spain (5), Italy (5) and the Netherlands (5). 57 studies were cross-sectional, three were cohort studies, and one was a randomized controlled trial.



Sample sizes varied between 54 and 7,090 participants (median: 336). The response rate varied between 16% and 88%. The included studies were conducted between 1994 and 2014. The studies included either single specialty (16 studies), multiple specialties (31 studies) or did not provide data on specialty (15 studies). According to our review about 59% of physicians working in European hospitals are overall satisfied (Fig 2). According to meta-analysis results of physician satisfaction study scores in the form of continuous data (Table 1), the mean satisfaction was:

- 3.54 among studies reporting data on a scale from 1 to 5,
- 4.81 for studies with a scale from 1 to 7,
- 6.12 among studies reporting data on a scale from 1 to 10,
- 59.65 among studies with a scale from 0 to 100.

Table 1. Meta-analysis results of physician satisfaction study scores in the form of continuous data, grouped by range of scale.

NUMBER OF STUDIES INCLUDED IN META-ANALYSIS.	RANGE OF SCALE	POOLED RESULT (95% CI)	HETEROGENEITY
8 studies	1 to 5	3.54 (3.29-3.79)	$I^2=99.74$; $\tau^2=0.230$
5 studies	1 to 7	4.812 (4.70-4.94)	$I^2=77.68$; $\tau^2=0.0169$
3 studies	1 to 10	6.12 (5.74-6.52)	$I^2=91.72$; $\tau^2=0.1483$
9 studies	0 to 100	59.65 (56.80-62.51)	$I^2=92.31$; $\tau^2=15.6286$

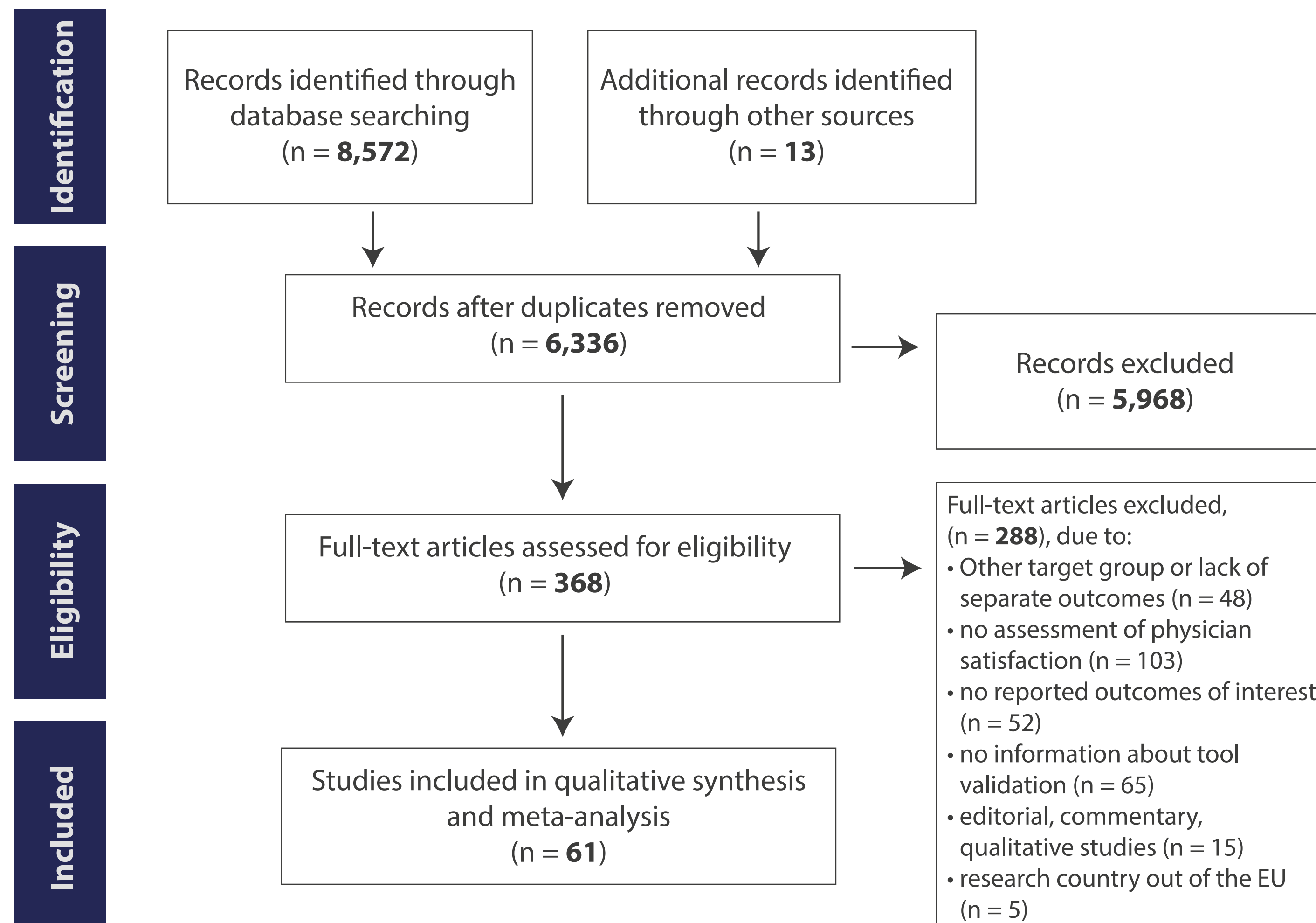


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram

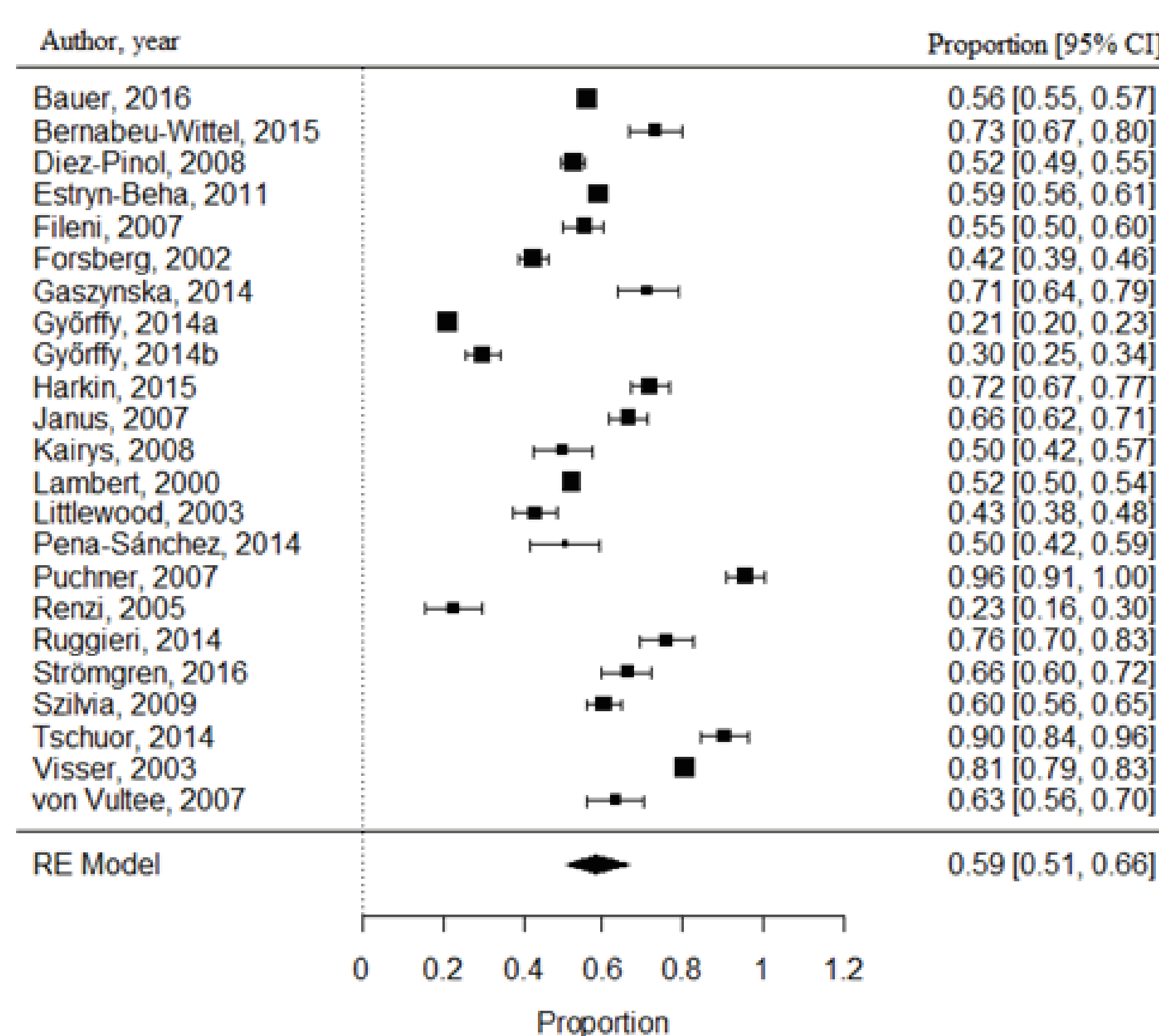


Figure 2. Meta-analysis of the studies provided results of physician satisfaction in the form of dichotomous data

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

Our study is the first systematic review in this field in Europe, providing a critical summary of the current state of the evidence for health care providers, policy-makers, and health care managers. In contrast with the moderate to high levels of physician satisfaction reported among North American studies the satisfaction of physicians working in European hospitals is at a moderate level. This research is a starting point for further in-depth analysis and comparisons of physician satisfaction in European countries. Physician satisfaction is closely connected with physician wellbeing and patient care. Knowledge about the satisfaction of the medical staff is crucial for policy-makers and health care managers in order to improve the motivation, professional development and retention of health care professionals. The main conclusions from our research are as follows:

- The satisfaction of physicians working in European hospitals is moderate.
- Based on results of studies in which data were presented in a dichotomous form: about 59% of physicians working in EU hospitals are satisfied or very satisfied.
- We identified both a large variety of scales used to assess the level of physician satisfaction and the lack of standardized tools, the implementation of which would allow us to compare the results obtained in various studies.
- The European shortage of physicians makes physician satisfaction especially important for motivation and retention in healthcare systems.
- It is necessary to monitor the levels of wellness and satisfaction of doctors and to control factors that determine it.
- Physician satisfaction is an important indicator for health care managers and policy-makers, so further in-depth analysis and comparative studies on physician satisfaction are recommended.

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