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Effect of Occupational Complexity on Cognition among Middle-Aged Adults: A Systematic Review

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Abstract: During midlife, majority of individuals spend a sizeable percentage of their lives at work, thus making it critical to understand how occupational complexity affects their cognitive abilities. The existing literature in this regard has offered limited and diverse understanding. The present systematic review aimed at studying the effect of occupational complexity on cognitive abilities among middle-aged adults. Literature search was carried out adhering to the PRISMA guidelines based on the eligibility criteria. Evidence was synthesized from the extracted data of fifteen suitable studies published between 2010 to 2020, which explored the effect of occupational complexity on cognitive functioning among middle-aged individuals. Most studies in this systematic review provided evidence for a strong positive association between occupational complexity and cognitive performance while some studies also reported a moderate evidence of mixed associations. Overall, the occupational complexity does seem to offer cognitive benefits among middle-aged adults. There is a need for developing universally standardized systems to classify occupation and measure cognitive performance for better generalizability in future research. The emerging evidence also conveys an intense need for policy makers, employers and healthcare experts to understand the impact of one's work profile and environment on their cognitive wellbeing.

Keywords: Cognition; Occupational complexity; Middle-aged adults.