

Physical and Psychological Health Outcomes of Qigong Exercise in Older Adults:  
A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis

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Running Title: HEALTH PROMOTION OF QIGONG EXERCISE

Word counts: 244 (abstract), 3320 (main text), 29 pages, 3 tables, 2 figures

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This is the author's manuscript of the article published in final edited form as:

Chang, P. S., Knobf, T., Oh, B., & Funk, M. (2019). Physical and psychological health outcomes of Qigong exercise in older adults: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *The American Journal of Chinese Medicine*, 47(02), 301-322. <https://doi.org/10.1142/S0192415X19500149>

Abstract: Physical limitations, depression, and anxiety are prevalent among older adults. Mild to moderate exercise can promote physical and psychological health and reduce the risk of chronic diseases. Qigong, a type of Chinese traditional medicine exercise, has demonstrated beneficial effects on physical ability and mental health in adults with chronic conditions. The purpose of this review was to systematically assess the effects of Qigong exercise on physical and psychological health outcomes in older adults. A total of 1,282 older adults aged 62 to 83 years with depressive symptoms, frailty, or chronic medical illnesses were included in this review. The meta-analysis showed that Qigong exercise resulted in significantly improved physical ability compared with active control or usual care (standardized mean difference [SMD] =1.00 and 1.20, respectively). The pooled effects of studies with thrice weekly Qigong sessions had the greatest effect (SMD=1.65) on physical ability in older adults. Lower quality studies had larger effect sizes than those with high quality. Although Qigong exercise showed favorable effects on depression, balance, and functioning, the overall effects did not reach statistical significance. No significant adverse events were reported. The findings suggest that Qigong exercise may be an option for older adults to improve physical ability, functional ability, balance, and to lessen depression and anxiety. However, the number of RCTs that enroll older adults is limited. More methodologically sound RCTs are needed to confirm the efficacy of Qigong exercise on physical and psychological health in older adults with chronic illnesses.

*Key words:* Qigong, balance; depression; functional ability; 6-minute walk test; physical ability.

## Introduction

Older adults often face physical and psychological health challenges as a result of the normal aging process and multiple chronic conditions. Approximately 18 million adults older than 65 years have physical limitations (Centers for Disease Control, 2009). Fifty-two percent reported having problems walking, grasping, carrying or pushing (Brault *et al.*, 2009); 75.3% had balance impairment, and the percentage increased to 89% for those over 80 years (Dillon *et al.*, 2010). Physical limitations and balance impairment contribute to lower functional ability that compromises the independence of older adults (McGuire *et al.*, 2007; Brault *et al.*, 2009; Salzman, 2010).

Psychological symptoms are commonly experienced in later life. Depression has been reported in 4.5% to 37.4% of adults older than 75 years (Geriatric Mental Health Foundation, 2013). Depression is associated with increased risk of morbidity; decreased physical, cognitive, and social functioning; and greater self-neglect – all of which contribute to increased mortality (Penninx *et al.*, 1999; Cooper *et al.*, 2011; Hamer *et al.*, 2011). Anxiety often coexists with depression in the older population (King-Kallimanis *et al.*, 2009). Anxiety has been reported in 15% of non-depressed older adults and 43% of those with depression (Mehta *et al.*, 2003). Depression and anxiety were found to be strongly associated with increased physical disability and diminished well-being of older adults (McGuire *et al.*, 2007; Brault *et al.*, 2009; Salzman, 2010).

Regular physical activity and exercise can improve physical and functional ability and psychological outcomes in adults of all ages (Chou *et al.*, 2012). Older adults, however, need exercise programs that correspond to age-related changes. Alternative forms of exercise with low impact, low demands on the muscles, and less energy expenditure may offer a potentially promising approach. Qigong, a Chinese traditional medicine exercise, has been suggested as a safe option for older adults with chronic conditions, physical limitations, or low levels of activity

(Jahnke *et al.*, 2010; Chan *et al.*, 2012). It consists of gentle movements, breathing exercise, and meditation. Qigong exercise has been found to improve muscle strength, endurance, and flexibility and balance, as well as to prevent falls in the aged (Rogers *et al.*, 2009; Jahnke *et al.*, 2010; Chang *et al.*, 2018). Qigong exercise also has beneficial effects on depressive symptoms and psychological well-being in older adults (Huo, 2010; Jin, 2010; Oh *et al.*, 2010; Chang *et al.*, 2018), comparable to aerobic exercise (Wang *et al.*, 2013). Despite the gentleness of Qigong exercise, the aerobic effects fall within the moderate-intensity level of exercise related to cardio-respiratory response (Lan *et al.*, 2004; Taylor-Piliae and Froelicher, 2004). However, there is no known systematic evaluation of the physical and psychological effects of Qigong exercise in the older population. The purpose of this systematic review is to describe and synthesize the effects of Qigong randomized controlled trials (RCTs) on physical ability, functional ability, balance, depression, and anxiety in older adults.

## **Methods**

### *Search Strategy*

A literature search was conducted to identify potential Qigong research articles published through September 2016. The key words used for the search were 'Qigong' and 'old adults' or 'elderly' and limited to 'randomized controlled trial' in the CINAHL, PubMed, AMED, and Scopus databases. No date restrictions were used to filter the searches.

### *Study Selection*

Articles that investigated the effects of Qigong interventions on physical and psychological outcomes with RCT design were included initially. A set of exclusion criteria was established for

further filtering the articles. We excluded articles that: (1) were not published in English; (2) had the mean age of study participants less than 60 years; (3) were commentary, reviews, meta-analyses, Qigong protocol, and qualitative research; (4) used Tai Chi Qigong, Qigong massage, laughing Qigong and external Qigong as an intervention. Studies using Tai chi Qigong were excluded because the independent effect of Qigong cannot be determined when it is combined with Tai chi. Furthermore, Qigong massage and External Qigong rely on a trained Qigong master to emit and circulate Qi, the vital energy, on participants for treatment; the theory of laughing Qigong is to use the individual's own voice to synchronize and re-establish the balance of the vital energy circulation (Chan *et al.*, 2012). Hence, the underlying mechanisms of these Qigong methods are different from Qigong exercise that this review was designed to explore.

#### *Data Extraction and Synthesis*

Information on the study sample, medical conditions, interventions, intervention duration, physical and psychological outcomes measured, and primary results were extracted using an investigator-designed data extraction form. Two reviewers (PC, RS) extracted data independently. Included studies were reported based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis Protocols (PRISMA) (Moher *et al.*, 2009).

Extracted data were synthesized using meta-analytical methods. The data that could not be included in the meta-analysis were summarized in narrative form. RevMan 5.3 software, provided by the Cochrane Collaboration (Oxford, United Kingdom), was used for meta-analysis. The intervention effect was defined as the standardized mean differences (SMD) and a 95% confidence interval (CI) of the post-intervention scores. Each outcome was tested for heterogeneity using a chi-square test and  $I^2$  statistic. A  $I^2$  value greater than 50% indicates significant heterogeneity in which the random effects model was used, as the weights given to the individual studies were more even and the summary effect was more conservative. The

fixed effects model was used when no heterogeneity was detected. Data in relation to physical and psychological outcomes were analyzed in two separate comparisons between Qigong and active (e.g., daily walking or yoga) and non-active (e.g., reading newspapers or usual care) control interventions. Funnel plots were not used to assess publication bias, as no more than 10 studies were included for each comparison. Subgroup analyses were stratified and pooled by types, frequency, duration of Qigong interventions, active and non-active comparison groups, and quality of the study.

#### *Assessment of Risk of Bias (ROB) in Individual Studies*

Two reviewers (PC, RS) independently evaluated the ROB using The Cochrane Collaboration's tool for assessing risk of bias (Higgins and Green, 2011). Selection bias, performance bias, detection bias, attrition bias, reporting bias, and other potential sources of bias were evaluated in all included studies and rated as yes, no, and unclear. Discrepancies were discussed with a third reviewer (BO) to reach a consensus.

## **Results**

#### *Eligible Studies*

One hundred and eight articles were initially identified. Duplicated articles (N=20) were eliminated. Ninety-eight full-text articles were located and their abstracts reviewed for inclusion. The final number of studies meeting the criteria was 14 (Figure 1).

#### *Characteristics of Studies, Individuals, and Interventions*

The data from the 14 studies are summarized in Table 1. Five studies were conducted in Hong Kong, three in China, one in Australia, three in Germany, one in Spain, and one in the United States. Two trials only investigated the effects of Qigong exercise on physical and functional ability. Three examined the effects on only depression and anxiety, and nine assessed both psychological and physical outcomes.

There were several types of Qigong exercise in the 14 RCTs, including the combination of Eight-Section Brocades and Yijin Jing, Medical Qigong, Baduanjin (Health Qigong), Dantian and Nei Yang Gong, Liuzijue Qigong, Hu Yue Xian, and modified Yijin Jing. These Qigong exercises have mutual components – slow body movements, breathing exercise, and meditation. One of 14 studies (Campo *et al.*, 2013) did not report the forms of Qigong exercise. The comparable interventions in the control groups were newspaper reading, daily walking, a combination of daily walking and breathing exercise, usual care, exercise therapy, aerobic training, and Viniyoga.

Qigong exercise was studied in populations with Parkinson's disease, chronic neck pain, chronic low back pain, major depressive disorder, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), post-orthopedic surgery, and prostate cancer. The length of the Qigong interventions ranged from four days to six months, with a median duration of three months for studies assessing psychological outcomes and physical and functional ability. The duration of the individual sessions ranged from 30 to 90 minutes, frequency from one to four times per week, and the intervention dosage from 180 to 4,320 minutes.

### *Outcome Measurements*

The 6-minute walk test (6-MWT), Unified Parkinson's Disease Rating Scale III (UPDRS-III), the physical component of Medical Outcomes 36-item Short Form Health Survey (SF-36), Self-Concept Scale (SCS), and handgrip strength were used to evaluate physical ability. The

Monitored Functional Task Evaluation (MFTE), gait speed, lower leg muscle strength, the Functional Assessment of Cancer Therapy-General (FACT-G), and Hannover Functional Ability Questionnaire for measuring pain-related disability (FFbHR) were used to determine functional ability. Berg Balance Scale (BBS), Tinetti Test, and Timed Up & Go were used to assess balance.

A total of 13 different measures, including two objective measures, were used to evaluate depression and anxiety outcomes: cortisol and serotonin levels, SF-36, Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS), Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS), FACT-G, Hamilton Rating Scale of Depression (HRSD), Self-rating Depression Scale (SDS), Montgomery Asberg Depression Rating Scale (MADRS), Allgemeine Depression Scale (ADS), Regulatory Emotion Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (RESE), and the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI-18).

#### *Methodological Quality of Studies and Bias Risk*

The assessment of ROB is summarized in Table 2. Overall quality of the studies was fair; yet, due to insufficient information, the ROB in one study (Tsang *et al.*, 2003) was unclear. The concealment of allocation was often omitted and only seven studies reported the intervention allocation concealment. Given the nature of the Qigong exercise, most studies (93.3%) were unable to blind the interventions to participants.

#### *Effects on Physical Ability*

All studies that investigated the effects of Qigong exercise on physical and functional ability reported significant intergroup or within-group effects (Table 1). Three RCTs evaluated balance as an outcome and one reported significant effects on balance compared with the control group (Xiao and Zhuang, 2016).



Ten RCTs reported physical ability outcomes (Schmitz-Hubsch *et al.*, 2006; Tsang *et al.*, 2006; von Trott *et al.*, 2009; Ng *et al.*, 2011; Tsang *et al.*, 2013; Tsang *et al.*, 2013; Xiao and Zhuang, 2015; Teut *et al.*, 2016; Xiao and Zhuang, 2016; Zhang *et al.*, 2016), and concluded that Qigong exercise groups performed better on the 6-MWT (SMD=1.00 [95% CI, 0.21-1.80], I<sup>2</sup>=91%) compared with the active and non-active control groups (Figure 2a, 2b). Handgrip strength favored the Qigong groups (SMD=0.34 [95% CI, 0.08-0.61], I<sup>2</sup>=0%) and no heterogeneity was detected (Figure 2c).

### *Effects on Functional Ability*

Functional ability outcomes were reported in seven RCTs (von Trott *et al.*, 2009; Ng *et al.*, 2011; Oh *et al.*, 2012; Tsang *et al.*, 2013; Xiao and Zhuang, 2015; Teut *et al.*, 2016; Xiao and Zhuang, 2016), but one was excluded due to insufficient data reported (Tsang *et al.*, 2013). Qigong exercise groups showed better performance on MFTE (SMD=1.64 [95% CI, 1.28-2.01], I<sup>2</sup>=97%), compared with the active control groups. The pooled effects of all four RCTs (von Trott *et al.*, 2009; Ng *et al.*, 2011; Xiao and Zhuang, 2015; Teut *et al.*, 2016) on functional ability demonstrated the direction of effects towards the Qigong interventions rather than yoga, exercise therapy or daily walk (Figure 2d).

### *Effects on Balance*

Balance outcomes were reported in three RCTs (Tsang *et al.*, 2013; Teut *et al.*, 2016; Xiao and Zhuang, 2016). When combining all three RCTs in pooled analysis, the direction of effects on balance favored the Qigong intervention compared with the controls, but since the 95% confidence interval includes zero, the difference was not statistically significant (SMD=-0.26 [95% CI, -0.73 - 0.21], I<sup>2</sup>=74%)(Figure 2e).

### *Effects on Depression and Anxiety*

Eleven RCTs reported depression outcomes (Tsang *et al.*, 2003; Schmitz-Hubsch *et al.*, 2006; Tsang *et al.*, 2006; von Trott *et al.*, 2009; Ng *et al.*, 2011; Campo *et al.*, 2013; Tsang *et al.*, 2013; Tsang *et al.*, 2013; Martínez *et al.*, 2015; Xiao and Zhuang, 2015; Teut *et al.*, 2016) and six reported depression and anxiety or mental health (von Trott *et al.*, 2009; Ng *et al.*, 2011; Campo *et al.*, 2013; Tsang *et al.*, 2013; Xiao and Zhuang, 2015; Teut *et al.*, 2016). There was insufficient evidence to support improved depression or mental health for those in the Qigong intervention, compared with active (SMD=0.25 [95% CI, -0.06-0.56 ], I<sup>2</sup>= 0% and SMD= -0.11 [95% CI, -0.32-0.10 ], I<sup>2</sup>= 0%, respectively) (Figure 2f), and non-active controls (SMD= -0.52 [95% CI, -1.08-0.04], I<sup>2</sup>= 86% and (SMD= -0.03 [95% CI,-0.33-0.27], I<sup>2</sup>= 0%, respectively) (Figure 2g). Although not significant, the direction of effects on depression favored the Qigong interventions (Figure 2g). Only three RCTs (Schmitz-Hubsch *et al.*, 2006; Campo *et al.*, 2013; Zhang *et al.*, 2016) reported anxiety outcomes using three different measures, intervention dosage, health conditions, and forms of Qigong exercise, with two reporting significantly improved anxiety scores (Campo *et al.*, 2013; Zhang *et al.*, 2016) and one with decreased, but statistically insignificant, anxiety scores (Schmitz-Hubsch *et al.*, 2006).

### *Subgroup Analysis*

The subgroup analysis demonstrates no significant group differences in types of Qigong interventions, intervention duration, weekly class frequency, types of control interventions, and quality of the study. However, significant overall effects on post-intervention physical ability were found when comparing with the control groups, except the subgroups for the intervention duration of 4,320 minutes and the intervention types of yoga, exercise therapy, and daily

walking (Table 3). RCTs with class frequency of three times weekly (SMD=1.65,  $p=.02$ ) or intervention duration of 4,320 minutes (SMD=1.37,  $p=.06$ ) generated higher effects in physical ability. The intervention duration of 1,500 to 2,000 minutes shows significant overall effects on physical ability of older adults. RCTs with some risk of bias tend to have a higher mean SMD (0.84) than those with low risk of bias (0.57). Liuzijue, Yijinjing, and Dantian Qigong, compared with Health Qigong (SMD=0.57), could benefit older adults more in functional ability (SMD=0.81).

### *Safety and Adverse Events*

Five of 14 RCTs reported on adverse events (AEs). Four stated that no AEs occurred in either intervention or control groups (Tsang *et al.*, 2013; Tsang *et al.*, 2013; Martínez *et al.*, 2015; Xiao and Zhuang, 2015; Xiao and Zhuang, 2016). One reported that four participants experienced nausea, muscle ache, and muscle tension (von Trott *et al.*, 2009).

### **Discussion**

The systematic review and meta-analysis demonstrate the potential effects of Qigong exercise on physical ability, functional ability, and balance in older adults with chronic illness. Although there was insufficient evidence to support that Qigong exercise is better than yoga, daily walking, and exercise therapy to improve depression and overall mental health, over 80% of individual RCTs reported significant psychological and physical effects of Qigong exercise. Qigong exercise is considered safe for older adults, as no significant AEs were reported.

The data suggest that Qigong exercise improves physical ability in older adults. Specifically, Qigong exercise significantly improved the distances of the 6-MWT in older adults compared with usual care or daily walking. However, improvement in physical ability appears to

be influenced by the type of Qigong exercise and the intervention dosage. The subgroup analysis suggests that older adults benefit more from practicing Health Qigong, Liuzijue, Yijinjing, or Dantian Qigong three times weekly for a total of 1,500 to 2,000 minutes. The higher weekly class frequency does not lead to proportionally increased physical ability in older adults.

Although the pooled effects of Qigong exercise (von Trott *et al.*, 2009; Ng *et al.*, 2011; Xiao and Zhuang, 2015; Teut *et al.*, 2016) on functional ability among older adults with chronic pain or COPD were not statistically different from yoga, exercise therapy, or daily walking, ( $p=0.10$ ) and significant heterogeneity was detected (Figure 2d), the direction of effects favored the Qigong interventions. Objective or subjective measures could result in the significant heterogeneity, because the overall effects became significant when comparing RCTs with objective measures independently. Although the subgroup analysis did not show significant effects, Liuzijue, Yijinjing and Dantian Qigong seem to produce increased effect in functioning than Health Qigong.

Although the pooled effects of Qigong exercise on balance did not show statistically significant differences from control interventions ( $p=0.27$ ), the Qigong exercise appears to be more helpful than usual care or daily walking in terms of improving balance in older adults (Figure 2e). Significant heterogeneity was detected, which may be related to diverse forms and durations of Qigong interventions and different health conditions among older adults.

More than 50% of individual RCTs reported reduced depression and anxiety symptoms. Although not quite significant ( $p=0.07$ ), the pooled analysis showed that the direction of effects on depression favored Qigong interventions, which is consistent with a previous Qigong review in adult populations (Wang *et al.*, 2013). However, significant heterogeneity was noted and might be related to subjective psychological outcome measure (GDS) and subjects' different cultural backgrounds. Culture may influence participants' emotional expression and lead to the heterogeneity of depression outcome measures. An observation regarding the role of culture in expressing individuals' moods was reported in a Chinese study (Tsang *et al.*, 2003).

Possible explanations of the heterogeneity in this review include subjects' differences (health conditions or cultural backgrounds), various outcome measures, and different risk of bias (Sun *et al.*, 2014). Yet, subgroup analysis of this review was unable to fully explain the heterogeneity across studies (Table 3). Despite no significant subgroup differences in the quality of studies, the subgroup analysis revealed that the observed effect of Qigong interventions might be influenced by the study quality. Low quality studies were more likely to report increased effect than those of higher quality, which is consistent with a previous review (Wu *et al.*, 2015). Randomization sequence generation, allocation concealment, power analysis, management of the missing data, and blinding of outcome assessment were often unclear among included RCTs. Problems with sequence generation and adequate sample size can affect the accuracy of the RCT results due to lack of comparability between Qigong and control groups, which further compromises the precision of the pooled results in this review. The absence of allocation concealment was previously reported to increase intervention effect estimates by 30-40% (Schulz *et al.*, 1995), which is consistent with our subgroup analysis.

#### *Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research*

There are several limitations to this systematic review. Most studies were conducted in Asia and the review was limited to English-language studies. The limited number of RCTs; the heterogeneity in outcome measurements, Qigong interventions, intervention durations; frequency of weekly class; and varied methodological rigor make it difficult to determine the effectiveness of Qigong exercise on physical and psychological outcomes in older adults and to recommend minimum effective dosage, types, intensity, or format (sitting or standing) for older adults. Similar challenges of identifying Qigong intervention characteristics were reported previously as well (Wu *et al.*, 2015). It is also noted that the existing RCTs examining the

efficacy of Qigong exercise on the health of older adults is limited, with only 14 studies included in this review. Only one RCT (Campo *et al.*, 2013) included American older adults.

More methodologically rigorous trials with objective measures and older adults with various cultural backgrounds are needed to address needs in promoting physical ability, psychological health, functioning, and balance in older adults. Based on the evidence in this review, we cannot recommend the best form of Qigong exercise for older adults, although Health Qigong is the most common in the included RCTs and its feasibility, acceptability, and preliminary effects have been recently tested in American adults 65 to 85 years of age (Chang *et al.*, 2018). The older adults in this study reported that Health Qigong was physically acceptable, easy to learn and to incorporate into their daily life, and benefited their balance and flexibility, bringing them a feeling of calm and relaxation after eight weeks of practice (Chang *et al.*, 2018). Future research is encouraged to include Health Qigong in more rigorous RCTs, and continue to investigate its effects on the physical and psychological health of older adults.

## **Conclusion**

This review demonstrated that Qigong may be an exercise option with favorable effects on physical and functional ability, balance, depression, and anxiety for older adults with chronic health conditions. Our findings suggest an optimum intervention duration of at least 1,500 to 2,000 minutes and practice frequency of three times weekly for improving physical ability in older adults. Future studies with rigorous methods are needed to confirm Qigong effects on psychological health, balance, and functioning.

**Acknowledgements**

We thank Dr. Giorgos Bakoyannis for his valuable comments on data analysis and Rebecca Serfass (RS) for reviewing methodological quality and risk of bias in all studies. This work was supported by the Yale School of Nursing Doctoral Fellowship and Indiana University School of Nursing Faculty Development Fund.

**Conflict of Interest:**

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

**Author Contributions:**

PC, TK, and MF contributed to the conception and design of this review and data synthesis. BO contributed to the design of this review and data extraction. PC conducted the review of studies and assessed methodological quality and risk of bias. All authors were involved in writing of the manuscript and approved the final manuscript.

**Sponsor's Role:**

The sponsors had no role in the process of conducting this review.

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## Figure Legends

Figure 1. Flowchart of Paper Selection (RCT=randomized controlled trial)

Figure 2. Forest Plots of Effect Estimates of Qigong Exercise versus Controls on Physical Ability, Functional Ability, Balance, and Depression

a. 6MWT: Qigong vs. Active Controls

b. 6MWT: Qigong vs. Non-active Controls

c. Handgrip Strength: Qigong vs. Controls

d. Functional ability: Qigong vs. Active Controls

e. Balance: Qigong vs. Controls

f. GDS: Qigong vs. Active Controls

g. GDS: Qigong vs. Non-active Controls

Note. CI=confidence interval; SD=standard deviation; Std.=standardized; IV=independent variable; GDS=Geriatric Depression Scale.

Table 1. Summary of the Physical and Psychological Effects of Qigong Exercise in RCTs

| Authors, Year, and Location                       | Sample Size (N), Mean Age (SD), and Study Population                | Intervention Groups  | Duration (min. x week)                                     | Outcome Measures                                    | Main Results   |
|---|---|--|--|---|--|
| <b>Effects on Physical and Functional Ability</b> |   |  |  |   |  |
| <b>Population with Frailty</b>                    |   |  |  |   |  |
| Tsang et al., 2013<br>Hong Kong                   | N=134<br>Mean age=83 (6.0)<br>Frail older adults                    | I: Health Qigong (Eight-Section Brocades & Yijin Jing) (n=69)<br>C: Newspaper reading (n=65)         | 60 min. x 2 times per week x 12 weeks                      | Handgrip strength<br>Timed Up and Go                | No significant differences on handgrip strength and Timed Up & Go. There was a trend of improvement shown in the Qigong group but not in the control group.  |
| <b>Population with Cancer</b>                     |   |  |  |   |  |
| Oh et al., 2012<br>Australia                      | N=81<br>Mean age=62 (12.0)<br>Cancer                                | I: Medical Qigong (n=37)<br>C: Usual care (n=44)   | 90 min. x 2 times per week x 10 weeks                      | FACT-G  | Qigong group reported significantly improvement in physical and functional well-being ( $p < .001$ ).  |
| <b>Population with Psychological Problems</b>     |   |  |  |   |  |
| Tsang et al., 2013<br>Hong Kong                   | N=38<br>Mean age=79.7 (6.55)<br>Major depressive disorder           | I: Health Qigong (Eight-Section Brocades protocol)(n=21)<br>C: Newspaper reading & discussion (n=17) | 45 min. x 3 times per week X 12 weeks                      | Handgrip strength<br>Lower leg muscle strength      | Right handgrip strength significantly improved in the Qigong group ( $p = .034$ ). No significant difference was found on left handgrip strength and lower leg muscle strength in two groups.  |
| Tsang et al., 2006<br>Hong Kong                   | N=82<br>Mean age=82.11 (7.2)<br>Depression                          | I: Baduanjin (n=48)<br>C: Newspaper reading (n=34)   | 30-45 min. x 3 times per week x 16 weeks                   | SCS   | The Qigong group had significantly improved physical well-being ( $p = .001$ ).  |
| <b>Population with Chronic Medical Problems</b>   |   |  |  |   |  |
| Ng et al., 2011<br>Hong Kong                      | N=80<br>Mean age=71.8 (1.05)<br>COPD                                | I: Health Qigong (Baduanjin) (n=40)<br>C: Breathing and walking exercise (n=40)                      | 45 min. x 4 times  | 6MWT<br>MFTE  | Physical capacity ( $p < .001$ ) and functional ability ( $p = .02$ ) significantly improved in the Qigong group. Qigong group better maintained functional ability gained from a pulmonary rehabilitation program until 6 months than the control group.  |
| Xiao & Zhuang, 2016<br>China                      | N=96<br>Mean age=67.53 (8.56)<br>Mild to moderate Parkinson Disease | I: Bajuanjin Qigong and daily walking (n=48)<br>C: Daily walking (n=48)                              | 45 min. x 4 times per week X 6 months                      | BBS<br>Timed Up & Go<br>6MWT<br>Gait speed          | Balance ( $p = .041$ ), physical capacity ( $p = .042$ ), and gait speed ( $p = .011$ ) significantly improved in the Qigong group.  |
| Teut et al., 2016<br>Germany                      | N=176<br>Mean age=73 (5.6)<br>Chronic low back pain                 | I: Dantian and Nei Yang Gong (n=58)<br>C1: Viniyoga (n=61)<br>C2: Usual care (n=57)                  | Qigong: 90 min. x 12 classes<br>Yoga: 45 min. x 24 classes | SF-36<br>Tinetti Test<br>Handgrip strength<br>FFbHR | Compared with the usual care, back function ( $p = .03$ ) and right handgrip ( $p = .04$ ) significantly improved in the Qigong group, but not in the yoga group at 3 months. Although not significant, a trend of improvement on back function was shown in the Qigong group until 6 months ( $p = .064$ ). There was no significant difference in balance and physical functioning between 3 groups at 6 months. |
| Xiao et al., 2015<br>China                        | N=126<br>Mean age=71.1 (2.7)<br>COPD                                | I: Liuzijue Qigong & daily walk (n=63)<br>C: Daily walk (n=63)                                       | 45 min. X 4 times a week X 6 months                        | 6MWT<br>MFTE  | Physical capacity ( $p = .04$ ) significantly improved in the Qigong group, compared to the control group. Physical functioning showed significant changes within the Qigong group after the intervention ( $p = .04$ ).   |

| Authors, Year, and Location                     | Sample Size (N), Mean Age (SD), and Study Population      | Intervention Groups  | Duration (min. x week)                                     | Outcome Measures                                 | Main Results  |
|---|---|--|--|--|---|
| Zhang et al., 2016<br>China                     | N=148<br>Mean age=64.77 (11.07)<br>COPD                   | I: Modified Yi Jinjing (n=42)<br>C1: Daily walk (n=43)<br>C3: Usual care (n=45)                      | 60 min. x 3 times per week x 6 months                      | 6MWT   | The Qigong group walked significantly longer distances than other two groups ( $p<.001$ ).  |
| Von Trott et al., 2009<br>Germany               | N=117<br>Mean age=76 (8.0)<br>Chronic neck pain           | I: Dantian Qigong (n=38)<br>C1: Exercise therapy (n=39)<br>C2: Waiting list (n=40)                   | 45 min. x 2 times per week x 3 months                      | SF-36  | There was no significant difference for physical ability between three groups.  |
| Schmitz-Hubsch et al., 2006<br>Germany          | N=56<br>Mean age=63.8 (7.5)<br>Parkinson's disease        | I: Qigong (The Eight Brocades)(n=32)<br>C: Usual care (n=24)   | 60 min. x 2 times per week x 8 weeks                       | UPDRS-III  | Physical capacity significantly improved in the Qigong group at 3 ( $p<.01$ ) & 6 months ( $p=.0384$ ). Postural stability in the Qigong group was significantly better than the control group ( $p=.0044$ ) at 6 months. |
| <b>Effects on Depression and Anxiety</b>        |   |  |  |  |   |
| <b>Population with Frailty</b>                  |   |  |  |  |   |
| Tsang et al., 2013<br>Hong Kong                 | N=134<br>Mean age=83 (6.0)<br>Frail older adults          | I: Health Qigong (Eight-Section Brocades and Yijin Jing) (n=69)<br>C: Newspaper reading (n=65)       | 60 min. x 2 times per week x 12 weeks                      | GDS  | There is no significant difference on depression between two groups, but a trend of improvement on GDS was observed in the Qigong group.  |
| <b>Population with Psychological Problems</b>   |   |  |  |  |   |
| Tsang et al., 2006<br>Hong Kong                 | N=82<br>Mean age=82.11 (7.2)<br>Depression                | I: Baduanjin (n=48)<br>C: Newspaper reading (n=34)   | 30-45 min. x 3 times per week x 16 weeks                   | GDS  | Depression improved significantly in the Qigong group ( $p=.041$ ).   |
| Tsang et al., 2013<br>Hong Kong                 | N=38<br>Mean age=79.7 (6.55)<br>Major depressive disorder | I: Health Qigong (Eight-Section Brocades protocol)(n=21)<br>C: Newspaper reading & discussion (n=17) | 45 min. x 3 times per week x 12 weeks                      | GDS<br>HRSD<br>Cortisol Level<br>Serotonin level | Depression scores significantly improved in the Qigong group ( $p=.007$ ); however, no significant difference was found on the HRSD and cortisol and serotonin levels between two groups.                                 |
| <b>Population with Chronic Medical Problems</b> |   |  |  |  |   |
| Teut et al., 2016<br>Germany                    | N=176<br>Mean age=73 (5.6)<br>Chronic low back pain       | I: Dantian and Nei Yang Gong (n=58)<br>C1: Viniyoga (n=61)<br>C2: Usual care (n=57)                  | Qigong: 90 min. x 12 classes<br>Yoga: 45 min. x 24 classes | GDS<br>SF-36                                     | There was no significant improvement on depression between 3 groups after the intervention.   |
| Martinez et al., 2015<br>Spain                  | N=58<br>Mean age=73 (5.2)<br>Post-orthopedic surgery      | I: Hu Yue Xian Qigong (n=29)<br>C: Usual care (n=29)   | 90 min. x 2 times per week x 4 weeks                       | GDS  | Both the Qigong group and the usual care group showed improvement on depressive symptoms ( $p=.502$ ).  |
| Xiao et al., 2015<br>China                      | N=126<br>Mean age=71.1 (2.7)<br>COPD                      | I: Liuzijue Qigong and daily walk (n=63)<br>C: Daily walk (n=63)                                     | 45 min. x 4 times a week x 6 months                        | SF-36  | Mental health significantly improved in both Qigong group ( $p=.03$ ) and control group ( $p=.02$ ), but no intergroup changes.   |
| Zhang et al., 2016<br>China                     | N=148<br>Mean age=64.77 (1.07)<br>COPD                    | I: Modified Yi Jinjing (n=42)<br>C1: Daily walk (n=43)<br>C3: Usual care (n=45)                      | 60 min. x 3 times per week x 6 months                      | RESE   | The Qigong group showed more positive affect and better managed distress than the other two groups ( $p<.001$ ).  |
| Von Trott et al., 2009<br>Germany               | N=117<br>Mean age=76 (8.0)<br>Chronic neck pain           | I: Dantian Qigong (n=38)<br>C1: Exercise therapy (n=39)<br>C2: Waiting list (n=40)                   | 45 min. x 2 times per week x 3 months                      | SF-36<br>ADS                                     | There was no significant difference for mental health between three groups.   |
| Schmitz-Hubsch et al.,                          | N=56<br>Mean age=63.8 (7.5)                               | I: Qigong (The Eight Brocades) (n=32)<br>C: Usual care (n=24)  | 60 min. x 2 times per week x 8 weeks                       | MADRS  | There was no significant difference for depression between two groups. Anxiety and  |



| Authors, Year, and Location     | Sample Size (N), Mean Age (SD), and Study Population      | Intervention Groups   | Duration (min. x week)                | Outcome Measures | Main Results  |
|---------------------------------|---|---|---------------------------------------|------------------|---|
| 2006<br>Germany                 | Parkinson's disease                                       |   |                                       |                  | tension scores decreased in both groups.  |
| Tsang et al., 2003<br>Hong Kong | N=50<br>Mean age=72.9 (9.5)<br>Chronic physical illnesses | I: The Eight-Section Brocades and basic rehabilitation activities (n=24)<br>C: Basic rehabilitation activities (n=26) | 60 min. x 2 times per week x 12 weeks | GDS              | Depression scores improved more in the Qigong group; however, no significant difference was found in depression between the two groups ( $p=.145$ ).              |
| Ng et al., 2011<br>Hong Kong    | N=80<br>Mean age=71.8 (1.05)<br>COPD                      | I: Health Qigong (Baduanjin) (n=40)<br>C: Breathing and walking exercise (n=40)                                       | 45 min. x 4 times                     | SF-36            | There was no significant difference in mental health between two groups ( $p=.12$ )   |
| Populations with Cancer         |   |   |                                       |                  |   |
| Campo et al., 2013<br>USA       | N=40<br>Mean age=72.5 (Range: 58-90)<br>Prostate cancer   | I: Qigong (n=20)<br>C: Stretching exercise (n=20)   | 60 min. x 2 times per week x 12 weeks | BSI-18           | Anxiety improved significantly in the Qigong group ( $p=.003$ ). A trend of improvement in depression was shown in Qigong group, but not significant ( $p=.09$ ). |

Note. C: control group; SD: standard deviation; COPD: chronic obstructive pulmonary disease; 6MWT: 6-minute walk test; UPDRS-III: Unified Parkinson's Disease Rating Scale; BDS: Brown's Disability Scale; MFTE: Monitored Functional Task Evaluation; SF-36: Medical Outcomes 36-item Short Form Health Survey; BBS: Berg Balance Scale; FACT-G: The Functional Assessment of Cancer Therapy-General; FFbHR: Hannover Functional Ability Questionnaire for measuring pain-related disability; SCS: Self-Concept Scale; MADRS: Montgomery Asberg Depression Rating Scale; BDI: Beck Depression Inventory; GDS: Geriatric Depression Scale; HADS: Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale; BSI-18: Brief Symptom Inventory-18; ADS: Allgemeine Depressions Scale; HRSD: Hamilton Rating Scale of Depression; RESE: Regulatory Emotion Self-Efficacy Questionnaire.

Table 2. Risk of Bias Assessment of Included RCTs

|                             | Random sequence generation | Allocation concealment | Blinding of participants and personnel | Blinding of outcome assessment | Incomplete outcome data | Selective outcome reporting | Other sources of bias | Total |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|--|--------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|-------|
| Tsang et al, 2013           | ?                          | ?                      | -                                      | ?                              | +                       | +                           | +                     | 3     |
| Oh et al., 2012             | ?                          | ?                      | -                                      | ?                              | +                       | +                           | +                     | 3     |
| Campo et al., 2013          | +                          | +                      | -                                      | ?                              | -                       | +                           | +                     | 4     |
| Tsang et al., 2013          | +                          | ?                      | -                                      | +                              | +                       | +                           | +                     | 5     |
| Ng et al., 2011             | +                          | +                      | +                                      | +                              | +                       | +                           | +                     | 7     |
| Xiao & Zhung, 2016          | ?                          | ?                      | -                                      | ?                              | +                       | +                           | +                     | 3     |
| Teut et al., 2016           | +                          | +                      | -                                      | ?                              | +                       | +                           | +                     | 5     |
| Martinez et al., 2015       | +                          | +                      | -                                      | +                              | +                       | +                           | +                     | 6     |
| Xiao & Zhung, 2015          | ?                          | ?                      | -                                      | +                              | +                       | +                           | +                     | 4     |
| Zhang et al., 2016          | ?                          | ?                      | -                                      | +                              | ?                       | +                           | +                     | 3     |
| Von Trott et al., 2009      | +                          | +                      | -                                      | +                              | +                       | +                           | +                     | 6     |
| Tsang et al., 2006          | ?                          | +                      | -                                      | +                              | ?                       | +                           | +                     | 4     |
| Schmitz-Hubsch et al., 2006 | +                          | -                      | -                                      | -                              | +                       | +                           | +                     | 4     |
| Tsang et al., 2003          | ?                          | ?                      | ?                                      | ?                              | ?                       | +                           | +                     | 2     |

Note + : Low risk of bias; ? : Unclear risk of bias; - : High risk of bias (mean score for risk of bias is 4.2)

Table 3. Exploratory Comparisons of Subgroup Differences in Physical and Functional Ability

| Subgroups                           | Studies (n) | Subjects (n) | SMD (95% CI)       | p value of overall effect | I <sup>2</sup> (%) | p value of heterogeneity | p value of group differences |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|--------------|--------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Physical Ability</b>             |             |              |                    |                           |                    |                          |                              |
| Type of Intervention                |             |              |                    |                           |                    |                          |                              |
| Health Qigong                       | 5           | 376          | 0.58 (0.21, 0.94)  | .002                      | 65                 | .02                      | .62                          |
| Liuzijue, Yijinjing, Dantian Qigong | 4           | 380          | 1.08 (0.04, 2.12)  | .04                       | 95                 | <.001                    |                              |
| Yoga, exercise therapy, daily walk  | 3           | 267          | 0.51 (-0.06, 1.08) | .08                       | 81                 | .005                     |                              |
| Duration of Entire Intervention     |             |              |                    |                           |                    |                          |                              |
| =4320 minutes                       | 3           | 295          | 1.37 (-0.05, 2.79) | .06                       | 96                 | <.001                    | .29                          |
| 1500-2000 minutes                   | 4           | 285          | 0.68 (0.43, 0.92)  | <.001                     | 47                 | .13                      |                              |
| ≤1080                               | 3           | 226          | 0.38 (0.12, 0.65)  | .005                      | 52                 | .12                      |                              |
| Frequency of Class Weekly           |             |              |                    |                           |                    |                          |                              |
| >3 times                            | 3           | 260          | 0.54 (0.03, 1.04)  | .04                       | 74                 | .02                      | .24                          |
| =3 times                            | 3           | 206          | 1.65 (0.21, 3.09)  | .02                       | 94                 | <.001                    |                              |
| <3 times                            | 4           | 340          | 0.38 (0.16, 0.59)  | <.001                     | 44                 | .15                      |                              |
| Type of Control Intervention        |             |              |                    |                           |                    |                          |                              |
| Active                              | 6           | 522          | 0.67 (0.05, 1.29)  | .03                       | 91                 | <.001                    | .53                          |
| Usual care, wait list               | 7           | 546          | 0.96 (0.33, 1.59)  | .003                      | 91                 | <.001                    |                              |
| Quality of the Study                |             |              |                    |                           |                    |                          |                              |
| Some risk of bias                   | 5           | 392          | 0.84 (-0.15, 1.83) | .09                       | 95                 | <.001                    | .60                          |
| Low risk of bias                    | 6           | 464          | 0.57 (0.38, 0.76)  | <.001                     | 12                 | .34                      |                              |
| <b>Functional Ability</b>           |             |              |                    |                           |                    |                          |                              |
| Type of Qigong Exercise             |             |              |                    |                           |                    |                          |                              |
| Health Qigong                       | 4           | 261          | 0.57 (0.32, 0.82)  | <.001                     | 0                  | .49                      | .18                          |
| Liuzijue, Yijinjing, Dantian Qigong | 3           | 293          | 0.81 (0.55, 1.06)  | <.001                     | 97                 | <.001                    |                              |

SMD=standardized mean difference

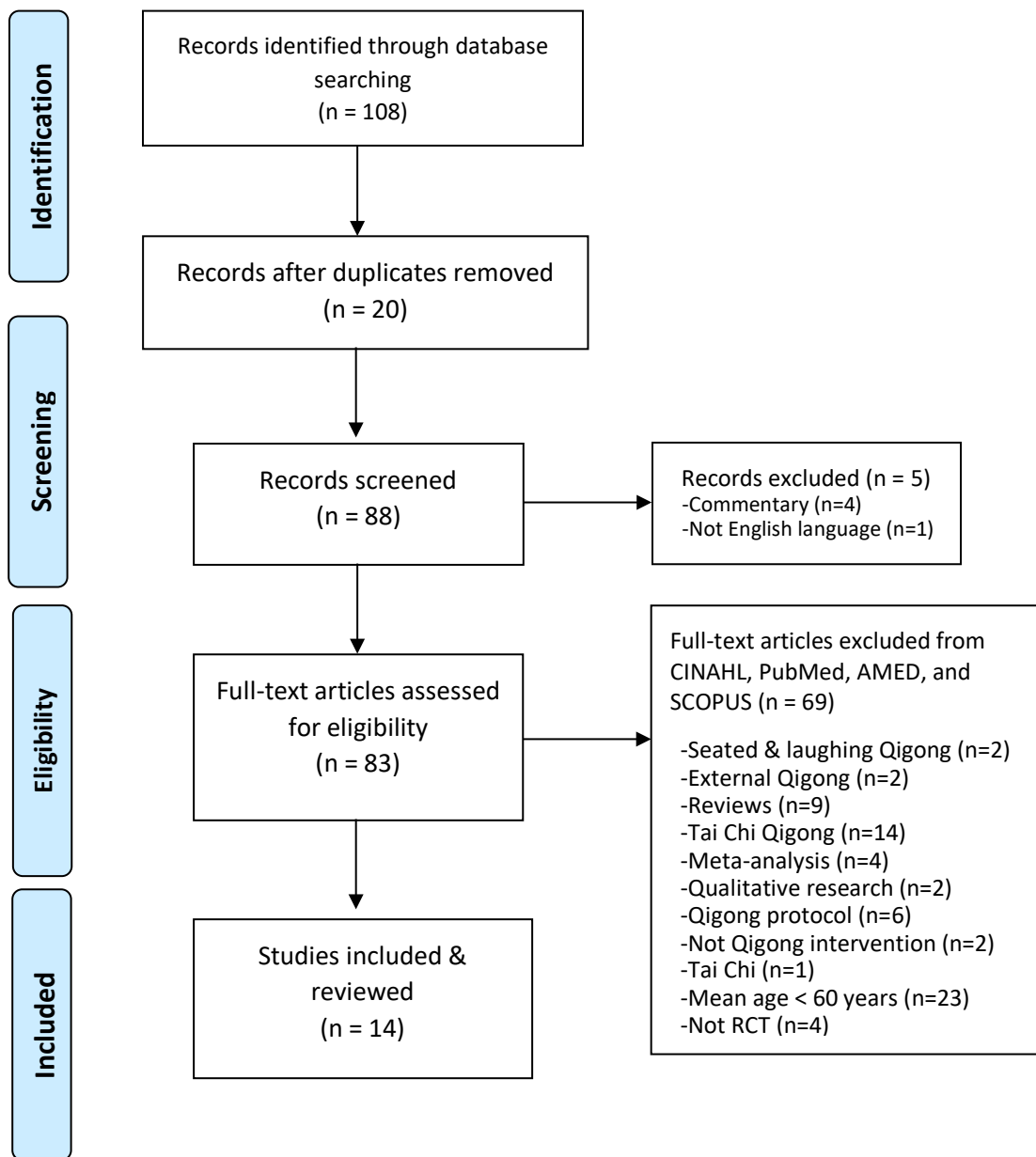


Figure 1

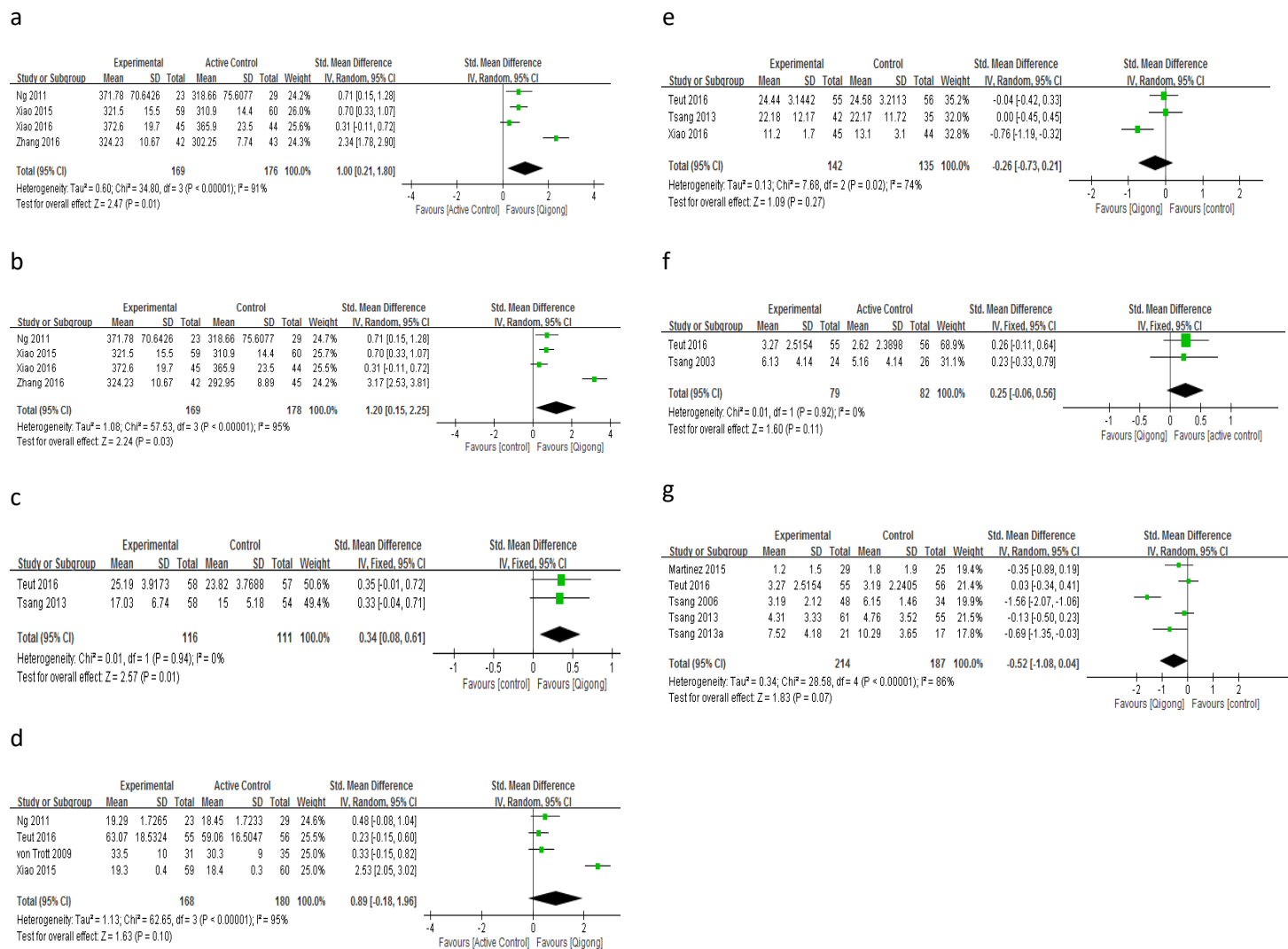


Figure 2