

# Primary-Secondary School Transitions, Academic Outcomes, Engagement and Motivation

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## Background

### Primary-Secondary School Transitions:

The move from primary to secondary school is undertaken by many young people globally, at a time where they experience challenges such as increased vulnerability to developing mental illness (Rossiter et al., 2018). Much research focuses on negative aspects of the move, but many pupils have overall positive transitions experiences (Gilbert et al., 2021).

However, there has been a potential link identified between primary-secondary transitions and negative academic outcomes (Jindal-Snape et al., 2020), making this an area of particular interest.

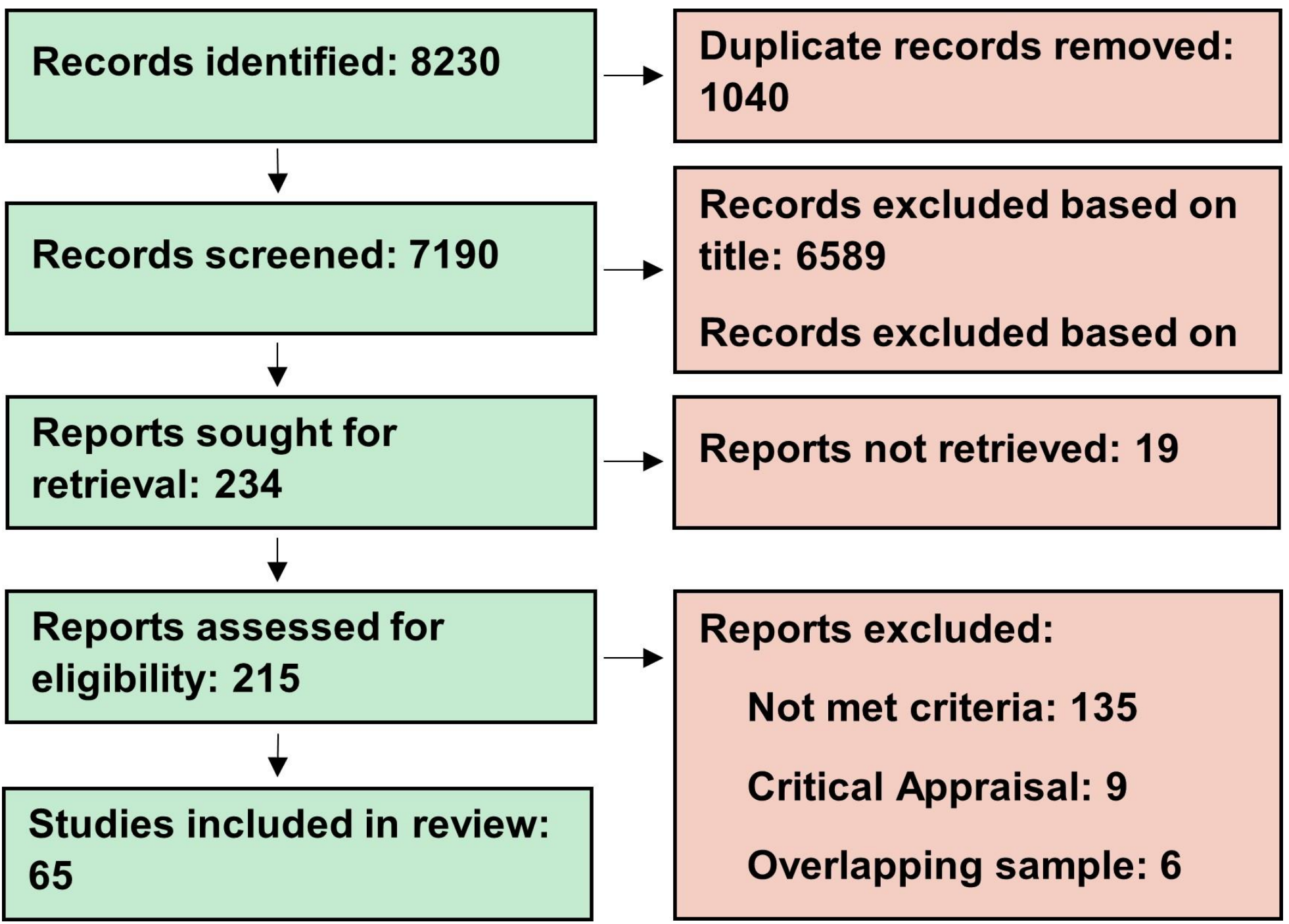
### Multiple and Multi-Dimensional Transitions:

Jindal-Snape’s (2016; 2023) Multiple and Multi-dimensional Transitions (MMT) Theory views transitions as ongoing processes consisting of multiple interacting transitions experienced simultaneously. While interacting with and initiating other’s transitions in the ecosystem and vice versa.

## Methodology

Firstly, a protocol was published, outlining the methods. 8230 records were gathered through systematic searching of databases, journals, citations and emails. Titles, abstracts and full texts were screened and critically evaluated, with 65 studies included in narrative synthesis for the systematic review.

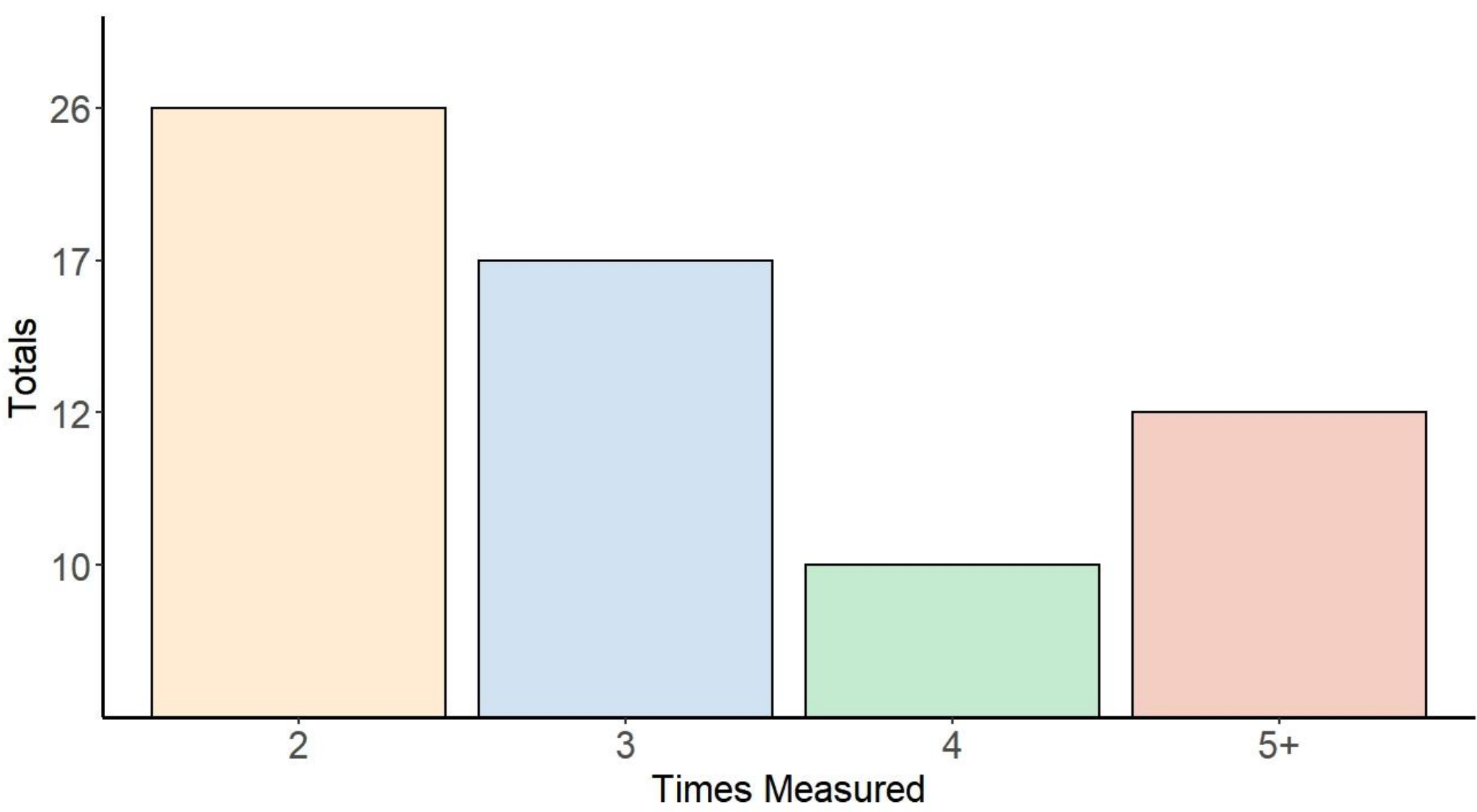
### Flow Diagram of the Screening Process



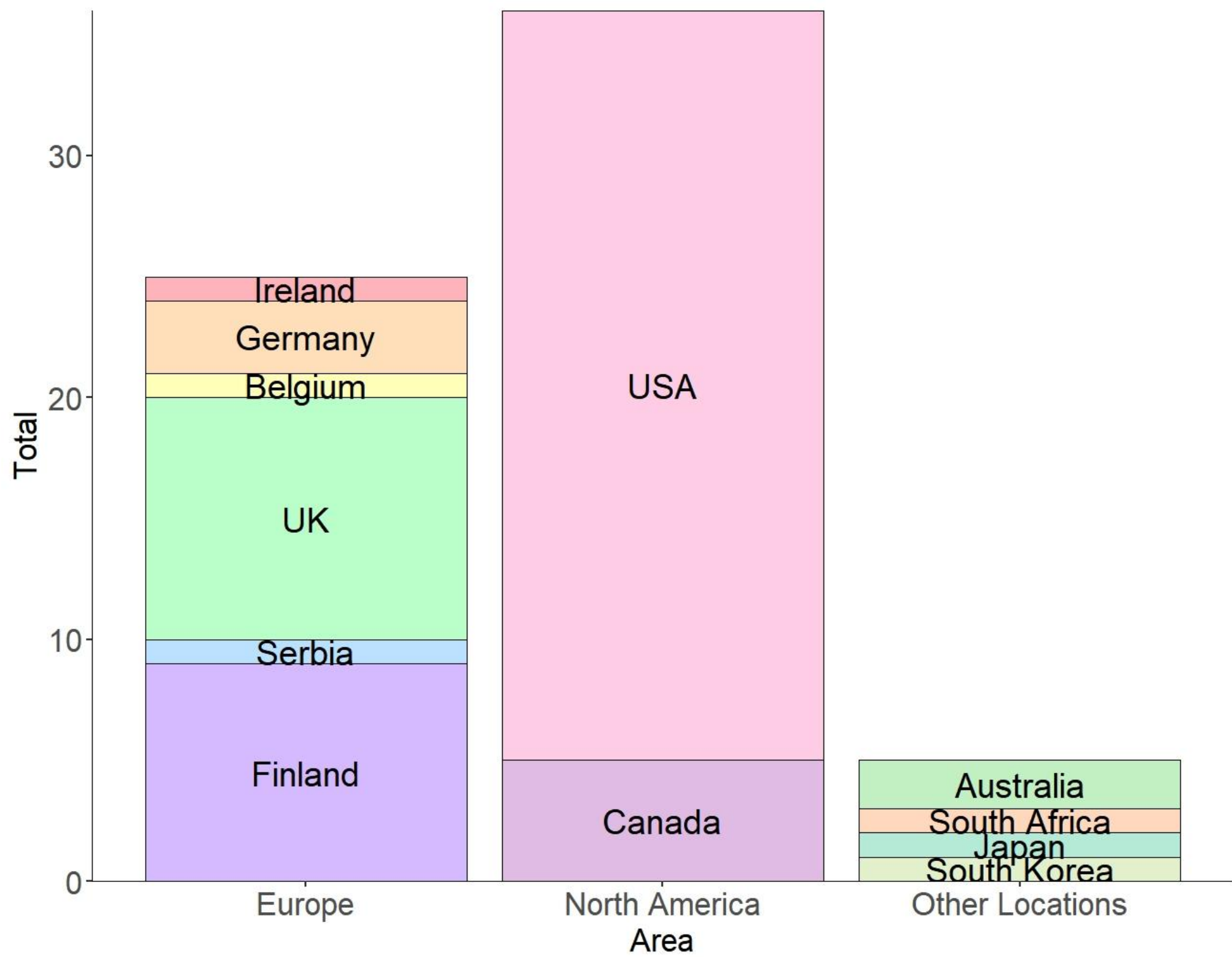
## Included Studies

Of the 65 included studies, the majority were from Europe, or North America. There were also a broad range of time points measured. Papers with only 1 time point measured were excluded as transitions are conceptualised as ongoing processes.

### Total number of timepoints measured in studies



### Countries in included studies by area



## Academic Outcomes

Overall Outcomes	Protective Factors
7 studies found <b>overall grades decreased</b> after the move to secondary school and 1 found a <b>dip that later stabilised</b> . 3 studies found <b>no overall change</b> .	Overall Grades
	Peer quality Strong relationships Peer support School wellbeing Engagement Parental support and resources Higher adaptation skills Growth mindset Perfectionism
Risk Factors	Mathematics and Numeracy
Overall Grades	Male gender Parenting factors Previous high ability Language skills Motivation
Male gender Black students Peer rejection Discipline referrals Learning avoidant goals Repeating a grade Moving school for high achievers	Reading, Literacy and Vocabulary
Mathematics and Numeracy	Resilience Teacher closeness Self-expectancy for success Academic motivation Mastery-goal orientation
Racial discrimination Bullying Ego-brittleness	
Reading, Literacy and Vocabulary	
Lower socioeconomic status	

## Discussion

There was an overall, although not universal trend of grade reductions and there were conflicting findings regarding engagement and motivation. However, looking at individual findings there were differences based on protective and risk factors. Inequalities such as lower socioeconomic status and racial discrimination were associated with risk.

Recurring protective and risk factors relate to peers, parents and teachers. This highlights the importance of social relationships related to primary-secondary transitions. Related to MMT theory, this suggests that an individual’s transitions are impacted by the transitions of significant others in their ecosystem.

Overall trends can be concerning but may obscure individual transitions experiences and outcomes. Considering factors related to differing outcomes, and addressing inequalities may help to appropriately support those at greater risk..

## Engagement and Motivation

Risk Factors	Overall Outcomes
Attitudes for School and Subjects	3 studies found value placed in attainment, schoolwork, and school liking <b>decreased</b> . 2 found education valuing <b>remained high</b> , and motivation <b>was stable</b> .
Socioeconomic status, transitions expectations, schoolwork pressure, peer and teacher relationships Male gender Female gender Parental academic structure Peer acceptance and friendships Perceptions of mathematics and reading and parental involvement Student satisfaction and competence Abrupt shift in pedagogy	
Academic/School Engagement	Protective Factors
Teacher conflict Foreign born students in the United States	Attitudes for School and Subjects
School Value, Liking and Belonging	High mathematics self-concept and attributing success internally Earlier experiences of language learning
Ethnic incongruence related to school belonging for boys School stress related to lower school satisfaction	Academic/School Engagement
Other Factors	Teacher and parent involvement Parent support Higher attendance Adaptive coping skills US born students in the US
Increasing school size More diversity than previous school	Other Factors
	Teacher experience Higher attendance Cynicism Increased peer support Hope Positive achievement emotions Teacher and peer support

### References (please see the QR code above for studies included in the systematic review):

Gilbert, A., Smith, N., Knudsen, L., Jindal-Snape, D., & Bradshaw, P. (2021). *Transition from Primary to Secondary School: Findings from the Growing Up in Scotland study*. Scottish Government. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/transitions-primary-secondary-school/>

Jindal-Snape, D. (2016). A-Z of transitions. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/az-of-transitions-9781137528261/>

Jindal-Snape, D. (2023). Multiple and multi-dimensional educational and life transitions: Conceptualization, theorization and XII pillars of transitions. In R. J. Tierney, F. Rizvi, & K. Ercikan (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Education (Fourth Edition)* (pp. 530–543). Elsevier. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-818630-5.14060-6>

Jindal-Snape, D., Hannah, E. F. S., Cantali, D., Barlow, W., & MacGillivray, S. (2020). Systematic literature review of primary–secondary transitions: International research. *Review of Education*, 8(2), 526–566. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3197>

Rossiter, R. C., Clarke, D. K., & Shields, L. (2018). Supporting young people's emotional wellbeing during the transition to secondary school in regional Australia. *Australian and international journal of rural education*, 28(1), 73-85. <https://search.informit.org/doi/abs/10.3316/INFORMIT.2666435232521428>