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Developing a Contemporary Definition of Family Nursing Using Scoping Review Methodologies

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Abstract

Objective: To map the literature to determine a contemporary, succinct definition of family nursing that can be used by health professionals, including nurses, nurse scientists, nurse educators, and policy makers across the globe, to inform scientific development of family nursing.

Introduction: This project addresses the disciplinary need to clearly articulate the meaning of family nursing.

Exclude criteria: Sources focused on family therapy or marriage and family therapy (MFT).

Inclusion criteria: Concept: family nursing. Context: across the continuum of care from direct care inpatient settings to within the community in any country worldwide. Participants: individual family members; family dyads or subsets or subsystems; family caregivers; or the family unit.

Methods: Key information sources will be disciplinary data bases, professional nursing associations, and texts (research, theoretical, philosophical, clinical, research, and educational texts) and grey literature (e.g., policies, dissertations, theses, and reports). A database search that was unlimited in dates will be used. Exploration will be in documents written in Chinese, English, French, Japanese, Portuguese, or Spanish languages (s). If searches result in sources other than these languages, consultation with native speakers of those languages will be sought from within professional networks of the authors.

Titles, abstracts, and full-text articles will be reviewed by at least two reviewers with conflicts resolved through discussion with a third reviewer. Data will be extracted from full texts, analyzed, and categorized. Results will be used to create a preliminary definition of family nursing for review by consultants with expertise in family nursing and revision by the study team.

Keywords: care; caregivers; family; health care; nursing

Introduction

Though many definitions of family nursing have been used across time, the context within which care is provided has changed rapidly and continues to evolve. Several terms aligned with family nursing are found in the literature. These terms include the following: family nursing practice, family health nursing, family systems nursing, family care nursing, family and community nursing, family-centered care, and family-focused nursing. Each of these terms is separately defined. Yet, these definitions often describe models of care, not family nursing as a scientific concept upon which to build a research program.

The goal of this review is to develop a contemporary definition of family nursing that can inform research, education, practice, and policy in the discipline and guide organizations such as the International Family Nursing Association into the future. In addition, a contemporized definition of family nursing has the potential to fine-tune what is meant by family nursing and inform enhanced evidence-based family nursing practice. Enhanced evidence-based family nursing practice improves health outcomes for families and patients (Chesla et al., 2010). Development of a contemporary, globally informed definition of family nursing will also enhance its inclusivity within many cultures since the impact of family nursing may vary globally. As well, a globally informed definition of family nursing can inform health policy.

Current Definitions of Family and Family Nursing

Family

Family, for the purpose of this review, is *whomever the patient and family define it to be* (Wright & Leahey, 2013). The Family Nursing Network definition provides a more comprehensive and relevant perspective. *'The family consists of two or more individuals joined by affectional bonds, the influence of which may fluctuate with time and circumstances, but which persists through the lifespan. Family membership is mutually defined and includes elements of shared beliefs, emotional, social, physical and economic support.'* (Claveirole et al., 2001).

Families are typically operationally defined in terms of demographics and structure. Key demographics may be ages of persons, genders, ethnicity, geographic location, number of family members, income, educational level, and employment status. Common structural definitions include family type (e.g. nuclear, blended, extended, stepfamilies, etc.).

Family Nursing

Family nursing, as preliminarily defined by this scoping review's authors, includes *care for individuals within the context of families, with consideration for the family and the effects of the health experience on family members; family dyads or subsets or subsystems; or the family as a unit*. Historically, family nursing has been defined through a practice lens as "a nursing intervention which is deliberately and consistently targeted at the level of the family unit" (Wright & Leahey, 2013). Interest in the concept of family nursing peaked in the literature in the 1980s and 1990s (Simpson &

Tarant, 2006). The purpose of family nursing is to promote, maintain, and restore family health; it is concerned with interactions between the family and society and among the family and individual family members. In working collaboratively with the family through education and encouragement the nurse helps families to utilize their strengths and mobilize their resources to evolve a more effective level of functioning (Hanson, 2005). Family nursing includes involvement of family members in the care of an identified patient (Coyne, 1996) and the aim of family nursing is to strengthen family resources and resolve their problems in different situations (Åstedt-Kurki, 2010). Family nursing as a relational inquiry rests on the ideals of compassion, respect, equitable relations, social justice, and honor of all life (Doane & Varcoe, 2006).

Measures of family nursing, from the perspectives of nurses and families, also contain definitions of family nursing. The Families' Importance in Nursing Care-Nurses' Attitudes (FINC-NA), a measure of *nurse's attitudes about the importance of family involvement in nursing*, (Benzein et al., 2008; Blöndal et al., 2014) has been used throughout the world and translated into several languages (Bega et al. 2022; Hagedoorn et al., 2021; Luttik et al., 2017; Naef et al., 2021b; Pascual et al., 2015) across several countries (Cranley et al., 2022; Shamali et al, 2023).

A recently developed measure, the Family Involvement in Care - Nurses Perception of Outcomes (FliC-NPO), assesses *nurses' satisfaction with the outcomes they perceive were achieved from within the family-nurse relationship and independent family nursing actions which bring forth family strengths*. Family nursing elements include the nurse's relationship with the person and the family or family members receiving care (Smith et al., 2023).

A systematic review examined the measurement properties of measures of *nurses' attitudes towards the importance of involving families in their clinical practice* (Diaz et al., 2019). Eleven studies in this review evaluated nurses' attitudes in adult units in Sweden (4), Australia (1), Hong Kong (1), Iceland (1), Netherlands (1), Portugal (1) and Taiwan (1), whereas the remaining eight studies evaluated nurses' attitudes in paediatric and/or neonatal units in Canada (4), Saudi Arabia (1), Ireland (1) Spain (1) Japan (1) and the United States (1).

Simpson and Tarrant (2006) developed the English version of the Family Nursing Practice Scale (FNPS) to measure *nurses' attitudes toward working with families, critical appraisal of their family nursing practice, and reciprocity in the nurse-family relationship*. The FNPS is available in German (Naef, Ernst, et al., 2021a), Portuguese (Rodrigues et al., 2021; Oliveira et al., 2025) and Chinese (Hsiao et al., 2017), and has been used in Iran (Sangi et al., 2023).

Family-centered care, which is a unique model of care, measures *pediatric nurses' perceptions and practices of family-centered care* through the use of the Family-Centered Care Questionnaire (FCCQ) Bruce & Ritchie, 1997). This measure has been used by Bruce et al. (2022) and Caty et al. (2001) in Canada, and Coyne et al. (2013) in Ireland.

The Measure of Beliefs about Participation in Family-Centered Service (MBP-FCS) (King et al., 2003) is a measure of *beliefs about family-centered philosophy and principles, positive and negative outcomes, personal competencies, and barriers* to be completed by parents or service providers that have been used in Canada.

The Family Nurse Caring Belief Scale (FNCBS) measures *nurses' attitudes toward the provision of family-sensitive care*. Family-sensitive care is nurse's receptivity to the family experience while utilizing and ordering these perceptions in order to be responsive to emerging family needs. Family-sensitive care includes the nurse's sensitivity to the immediate emotional, role, and practical demands of the family and the unique family-sensitive nursing interaction that is the most significant

component of nurse-caring behavior in a clinical setting (Meiers, Tomlinson, & Peden-McAlpine, 2007; Tomlinson & Harbaugh, 2004; Tomlinson, Swiggum, & Harbaugh, 1999). The FNCBS was developed in the English language and has been used in pediatric and neonatal critical care settings (Meiers, Tomlinson, & Peden-McAlpine, 2007; Magri, 2018) and translated into Turkish (Evgin & Sümen, 2023).

The Family-Nurse Boundary Ambiguity Scale for PICU (FNBAS-PICU) was developed to measure *relational sources of stress and boundary ambiguity for families of acutely ill children between the child's family and the child's health-care providers* (Tomlinson & Harbaugh, 2004). This is one of the few measures to be completed by family members about their perceptions of the family–nurse interface and family boundary ambiguity, as it exists in families of critically ill children who share their caretaking role with health providers.

In summary, many measures of family nursing have been developed between 1997 to present with variability in the definitions of family nursing upon which the measures have been based. Some common elements noted across measures are the nurse-family member relationship, providing care to the patient, working with families, the importance of involving families in care, and nursing satisfaction with their caring for families.

Search Feasibility

The aim of this scoping review is to understand the extent and type of evidence in relation to the concept of family nursing currently present in the literature to inform the development of a preliminary definition of family nursing from a global evidence perspective. Conceptualizations of family nursing used across the continuum of care from direct care inpatient settings to community settings internationally will be explored. Findings may be used by health professionals, including nurses, nurse scientists, nurse educators, and policy makers across the globe to inform scientific development of family nursing.

A test search of the Medline (Ovid), CINAHL (EBSCOhost), Emcare (Ovid), and Scopus databases resulted in 415 sources using the following search terms (MH "Family Nursing") OR (MH "Family Nurses") OR (MH "Family Nurse Practitioners") OR TI(family nurs*) AND AB(definition* or define* or meaning*). This indicates that evidence exists, and a scoping review is the most appropriate method to use to map the most contemporary definition available and to update, if needed.

A preliminary search of MEDLINE, the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, and *JB I Evidence Synthesis* was conducted and no current or underway systematic reviews or scoping reviews on the topic were identified.

Review question

This review will answer the questions:

What is family nursing across the continuum of care from direct care inpatient settings to community settings internationally when care is delivered to the individual within the family, to dyads or subsets of the family, and to the family as a unit?

Additionally, we will explore questions such as:

What is the predominant type of evidence within the sample?

From which countries do most publications in the sample originate?

What journals are the predominant journals represented within the sample?

Inclusion criteria

Participants

Participants referred to within the sources will be individual family members; family dyads or subsets or subsystems; family caregivers; or the family unit.

Concept

The concept being explored is family nursing.

Context

The context within which we will explore family nursing will be across the continuum of care from direct care inpatient to within the community in any country worldwide.

Types of sources

This scoping review will consider both experimental and quasi-experimental study designs including randomized controlled trials, non-randomized controlled trials, before and after studies and interrupted time-series studies. In addition, analytical observational studies including prospective and retrospective cohort studies, case-control studies, and analytical cross-sectional studies, will be considered for inclusion. This review will also consider descriptive observational study designs including case series, individual case reports, and descriptive cross-sectional studies as well as mixed-methods and multi-methods studies for inclusion.

Qualitative studies will also be considered that focus on qualitative data including, but not limited to, designs such as phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, qualitative description, action research and feminist research.

In addition, reviews, such as systematic reviews, that meet the inclusion criteria will also be considered, depending on the research question.

Text and opinion papers will also be considered for inclusion in this scoping review.

Methods

The proposed scoping review will be conducted in accordance with the JBI methodology for scoping reviews (Peters et al., 2020). This protocol has been registered in the Open Science Framework. Key information sources to be searched will be disciplinary databases and professional nursing associations and texts (research, theoretical, philosophical, clinical, research, and educational texts) and grey literature (e.g., policies, dissertations, theses, and reports). Evidence in databases between the beginning date for each database to March 15, 2025, will be included. Exploration will be primarily in documents in the Chinese, English, French, Japanese, Portuguese, and Spanish languages (s). If the searches result in sources other than these six languages, consultation with native speakers of those languages will be sought from within the professional networks of the researchers.

Search strategy

The aim of the search strategy will be to locate publications such as studies and texts, dissertations, and organizational and governmental documents. A three-step search strategy will be utilized in this review. First, an initial limited search of SCOPUS, MEDLINE (Ovid) and CINAHL (EBSCOhost) will be undertaken to identify articles on the topic. The text words contained in the titles and abstracts of relevant articles, and the index terms used to describe the articles will be used to develop a full search strategy and the name of the relevant databases/information sources (see Appendix I). The search strategy, including all identified keywords and index terms, will be adapted for each included database and/or information source.

Source of evidence selection

Following the search, all identified citations will be collated and uploaded into a bibliographic database and duplicates removed. After a pilot test, titles and abstracts will be screened against the inclusion criteria for the review by two or more independent reviewers. Potentially relevant sources will be retrieved in full-text version, and their citation details imported into the Covidence software (2023). The full text of selected citations will then be assessed in detail against the inclusion criteria by two or more independent reviewers. Reasons for exclusion of sources of evidence at the full-text review step will be recorded within the Covidence software and reported in scoping review findings. Any disagreements that arise between the reviewers at each stage of the selection process will be resolved through discussion, or with an additional reviewer(s). The results of the search and the study inclusion and exclusion process will be reported in full in the final scoping review and presented in a PRISMA flow diagram (Page et al., 2021). The reference lists of all sources of evidence included for data extraction will be screened for additional relevant studies, with a repeat of the title and abstract and full-text steps.

Data extraction

Data will be extracted from eligible full-text articles and other sources included in the scoping review by two or more independent reviewers using a data extraction tool developed by the reviewers in the Covidence software. The data extracted will include specific details about the participants, concept, context, study methods, country of publication, and key findings relevant to the review questions. The JBI extraction instrument was used within the Covidence software (see Appendix II). The data extraction tool will be piloted by two reviewers reviewing the same five sources. A third reviewer will review for consistency between reviewers and revisions will be made to clarify the data extraction tool. The draft data extraction tool will be modified and revised as necessary during the process of extracting data from each included evidence source. Modifications and revisions will be detailed in the scoping review. Any disagreements that arise between the reviewers will be resolved through discussion or with an additional reviewer(s). If appropriate, authors of papers will be contacted to request missing or additional data, where required.

Data analysis and presentation

The evidence will be presented according to the review objective and question(s). Data will be categorized and presented graphically or in diagrammatic or tabular form. A narrative summary will accompany the tabulated and/or charted

results and will describe how the results relate to the review's objective and questions. Categorized data will be used to create a preliminary definition of family nursing for review and revision by consultants with expertise in family nursing. Interviews and focus group approaches will be used to access the expert opinions for experts in family nursing. Critique of the resulting conceptual definition of family nursing will also be sought from nurse theoreticians or nurse researchers who are not experts in family nursing.

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the consultants with expertise in family nursing who will review our preliminary definition of family nursing and provide recommendations for revision.

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Declarations

This scoping review is committed to fostering inclusion and equity by integrating diverse perspectives on family nursing from multiple countries and cultural contexts. Recognizing the variations in healthcare systems, policies, and nursing practices worldwide, this review aims to ensure a comprehensive and representative synthesis of the literature. All members are experienced researchers. Many are members of an international family nursing association.

Author contributions

The manuscript reporting the review's findings will detail each author's specific involvement in this scoping review. Contributions will include study design, contributing or collecting scoping review data, scoping review data analysis, interviewing family nurse experts and writing the manuscript to increase the transparency of contributions.

Conflicts of interest

A preponderance of the authors are members of the International Family Nursing Association (IFNA) and some have participated in developing statements on family nursing practice or family nursing education, which included definitions of family nursing. We will seek consultation from non-IFNA members who are nursing theoreticians or nurse researchers to critique the preliminary and final definitions of family nursing.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Search strategy

Search Strategies Family Nursing Definition - English

Scopus

#	Query	Results from 18 Mar 2025
1	(TITLE-ABS-KEY ("family nurs*" OR "nursing of famil*" OR "nursing care of families" OR "family heath nurs*" OR "family care nurs*" OR "family heathcare nur*" OR "family health care nurs*") AND (TITLE (assessment* OR evaluat* OR measurement* OR test OR tests OR scale* OR indicator* OR questionnaire* OR instrument* OR tool* OR definition* OR define* OR meaning* OR concept* OR trend* OR model*) OR ABS (definition* OR define* OR meaning* OR concept*)))	836
	Limit to English	746
	Limit to Portuguese	56
	Limit to Spanish	25
	Limit to Chinese	13
	Limit to Japanese	4
	Limit to French	9

Medline ALL (Ovid) 1946 to March Week 1 2025

#	Query	Results from 18 Mar 2025
1	(family nurs* or nursing of famil* or nursing care of families or family heath nurs* or family care nurs* or family heathcare nur* or family health care nurs*).ti,ab.	1,372
2	exp Family Nursing/	1,600
3	1 or 2	2,648
4	exp "Surveys and Questionnaires"/ or (assessment* or evaluat* or measurement* or test* or scale* or indicator* or questionnaire* or instrument* or tool* or definition* or define* or meaning* or concept* or trend* or model*).ti. or (definition* or define* or meaning* or concept* or model*).ab.	7,178,290
5	3 and 4	1,059
6	limit 16 to English language	951
7	limit 16 to Portuguese	45
8	limit 16 to Spanish	8
9	limit 16 to Chinese	8

10	limit 16 to Japanese	4
11	limit 16 to French	15

CINAHL (EBSCOhost)

#	Query	Results from 18 Mar 2025
S1	TI("family nurs*" OR "nursing of famil*" OR "nursing care of families" OR "family heath nurs*" OR "family care nurs*" OR "family heathcare nur*" OR "family health care nurs*") OR AB("family nurs*" OR "nursing of famil*" OR "nursing care of families" OR "family heath nurs*" OR "family care nurs*" OR "family heathcare nur*" OR "family health care nurs*")	1,919
S2	(MH "Family Nursing") OR (MH "Family Nurses")	2,464
S3	S1 OR S2	3,795
S4	TI (assessment* OR evaluat* OR measurement* OR test OR tests OR scale* OR indicator* OR questionnaire* OR instrument* OR tool* OR definition* OR define* OR meaning* OR concept* OR trend* OR model*) OR AB (definition* OR define* OR meaning* OR concept*)	1,122,841
S5	(MH "Scales")	476,789
S6	S4 OR S5	1,490,044
S7	S3 AND S6	906
	S7 limited to English Language	713
	S7 limited to Chinese Language 16	16
	S7 limited to French Language 1	1
	S7 limited to Portuguese Language 128	129
	S7 limited to Spanish Language 19	19
	S7 limited to Japanese Language 4	4

Appendix II: Data extraction instrument

The JBI extraction instrument was used within the Covidence software program.

