

## Overview on the Role of Spirituality in Nursing

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### Abstract

Research concerning spirituality is growing rapidly, and the implementation of spiritual care should be based on evidence. This literature review aims to describe the methods that have been used in nursing research focusing on spirituality. Research on spirituality in nursing is based on both main paradigms (quantitative and qualitative), but also on mixed methods.

**Keywords:** Research; Nursing; Spirituality; Quantitative; Qualitative methods

### Introduction

Spirituality is often defined as a fundamental dimension in people's lives an integral and universal dimension of the human condition. Spirituality is based on several foundations from various religious traditions, spiritual movements, belief systems, cultures, and contexts. The way spirituality is lived and felt depends on each individual, since it is an individual experience, even when beliefs and traditions are shared many authors have defined the concept of spirituality in different ways, so a consensus has been difficult to achieve, as the concept may have several meanings [1]. Still, the main attribute and characteristic of the concept is the need to find purpose and meaning in life.

Spirituality has been described as critical for patients' health and for healthcare practice and the benefits of spiritual experiences and beliefs on health have been highlighted. For example, spirituality plays a critical role in terminally ill patients against end-of-life despair. Spirituality is a positive dimension of the human being and care and might help patients reframe their experiences and condition of illness as well as find meaning in life and in that circumstance. Several barriers to spiritual care have been identified, such as the lack of education and preparedness, and the reductionist understanding of the concept of spirituality, which has led nurses to perceive their competencies as scarce in providing spiritual care. Nurses require competencies in three domains to provide spiritual care: awareness and use of self, spiritual dimension of the nursing process, and assurance and quality of expertise [2].

Additionally, the nurses' personal spirituality plays a critical role in the perceptions of spirituality and competencies in providing spiritual care. Spiritual care is defined as a subjective and dynamic concept, and is considered a unique aspect of care. It is based on an interdisciplinary approach, in which each professional plays an important role, and nurses are also responsible for providing individualized spiritual care to patients and families.

Nursing care is expected to be holistic, so the spiritual dimension should be taken into consideration. In the last couple of decades, the new concept of spiritual well-being has emerged, which seeks to bring together the concepts of spirituality and wellness. This new concept of spiritual well-being is characterized by having a multidimensional background and is often considered an indicator of the patients' quality of life and spiritual health status. Research on spirituality in nursing has existed at least since the 1980s, and this topic continues to be widely studied. Regardless of the evident and recent increase in the number of publications on spirituality, the number of publications is small when compared to other topics, and when considering the

overall development and increase of healthcare research and nursing journals [3]. The results of this review concern a period of over 30 years, and 231 articles were included reporting research on spirituality in nursing. Although spirituality has an evident heritage in healthcare, empirical evidence became more often published in nursing literature in the 1980s. Since 2000, a significant increase of primary studies in spirituality has been published and this topic is sometimes considered a new field of research.

Regarding the research topics, few studies have been identified on nursing diagnosis validation concerning spirituality, and those included in this review mainly used models for nursing diagnosis validation. The importance of the validation of nursing diagnoses in spirituality is to assess the needs of patients and to improve clinical practice in nursing.

Nursing is a scientific discipline that is developing rapidly, and nursing practice is expected to be evidence-based. This should also be expected with regard to implementing spirituality in nursing practice or in providing spiritual care [4]. Thus, it is important to find a deeper understanding of the methodological approach previously used in nursing research concerning spirituality towards the continuity of evidence development and the adequacy of research approaches to the study of this human dimension.

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**Received:** 06-Jan-2022, Manuscript No. JCPHN-22-51821; **Editor assigned:** 07-Jan-2022, PreQC No. JCPHN-22-51821(PQ); **Reviewed:** 21-Jan-2022, QC No. JCPHN-22-51821; **Revised:** 26-Jan-2022, Manuscript No. JCPHN-22-51821(R); **Published:** 02-Feb-2022, DOI: 10.4172/2471-9846.1000324

**Citation:** Russle A (2022) Overview on the Role of Spirituality in Nursing. *J Comm Pub Health Nursing*, 8: 324.

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