



Review

Clinical nursing and midwifery research in African countries: A scoping review

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ABSTRACT

Background: Globally, the nursing shortage has been deemed a crisis, but African countries have been hit hardest. Therefore, it is of utmost importance nurses use the best available evidence and that nursing research is targeted to address gaps in the evidence. To achieve this, an understanding of what is currently available and identification of gaps in clinical nursing research is critical.

Objectives: We performed a scoping review of existing literature to assess clinical nursing research conducted in all African countries over the past decade, identify gaps in clinical nursing and midwifery research, determine whether they match with health priorities for countries, and define priorities for regional clinical nursing research agendas to improve health outcomes.

Design: This is a scoping review of published clinical nursing research conducted in African countries.

Data sources: Systematic searches of literature published between January 01, 2004 and September 15, 2014 were performed in PubMed, Medline, CINAHL, and Embase.

Review methods: Research was included if it was conducted by nurses, included data obtained in African countries or regions within the African continent, published in a peer-reviewed journal with an abstract, and included patient outcomes. Abstracts were independently reviewed for inclusion by two authors. The following data were extracted: countries of publication and study, study type and design, journal, language, and topics of research. Gaps in the literature were identified.

Results: Initially, 1091 papers were identified with a final sample of 73 articles meeting inclusion criteria. Studies used 12 designs, were published in 35 journals published in five countries (including two African countries); 29% of the research was published in a single journal (Curatoni). Research was mostly qualitative (57%) and included twenty countries in Africa (38%). There were 12 major topics of study, most often midwifery/maternal/child health (43%), patient experiences (38%), and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)/sexually transmitted infections (STIs) (36%).

Conclusions: Areas most often studied were associated with funding sources (e.g., a large influx of funds for HIV-related research). Major and common health care problems in African countries (e.g. infectious disease other than HIV, and noncommunicable diseases such as malnutrition, diarrheal disease, hypertension and diabetes) were not subjects of the published literature, indicating a clear gap

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between health care needs and problems and the focus of the majority of clinical nursing research.

Additionally, the shortage of doctorally prepared nurses may contribute to the lack of clinical nursing and midwifery research in African countries.

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Contribution of the paper

What is already known about the topic?

- While there has been nurse-led research primary and secondary prevention of cancer in South Africa, there is a need for nurse-led clinical research on other topics and in other African countries.
- Research with a clinical focus is among the most lacking of nursing and midwifery research in African countries.

What this paper adds

- This paper adds to the literature by summarizing recent areas of clinical nursing research conducted in Africa and identifying gaps to be addressed; clinical nursing and midwifery research produced by African countries remains scarce and the majority is still produced by South Africa.
- More clinical nursing research is needed to address a number of unmet needs in African countries, including many common health care topics.
- In African countries there is a continued need for development of nurse researchers, an understanding of research priorities, and research focused on patient outcomes.

1. Introduction

African countries maintain pace with high-income regions in the growing number of obese adults and chronic conditions while also continuing to have the highest rates of maternal and fetal mortality, infectious diseases, malnutrition and many other healthcare problems less common in high-income countries (World Health Organization, 2012). Nevertheless, African countries have the lowest health care expenditures of all World Health Organization (WHO) regions. Although nurses provide the majority of healthcare, Africa also has the fewest healthcare workers in the world, including the least number of nurses and midwives in any WHO region (Crisp and Chen, 2014; World Health Organization, 2012). Concurrently, the majority of healthcare research is generated within the United States and Europe, creating evidence for practice that is potentially not applicable in African countries with limited resources and vastly different healthcare problems (Levine, 1991; Setlhare et al., 2014). Furthermore, nursing research is critical because nurses spend more time with patients than other healthcare professionals, positioning them to make important discoveries that otherwise may go unnoticed (Dugdale et al., 1999; Hendrich et al., 2008; Horrocks et al., 2002).

Clearly, if research is to be relevant and have an impact on practice, it must be accessible to front line practitioners. Our goal in this project was to enable nurses and midwives in African countries to use evidence in their practice by identifying what research is currently available and what gaps need to be pursued.

To our knowledge, in the past ten years, there have only been two reviews of nursing research conducted in African regions, but neither provided an overview of clinical nursing research. For the purpose of this review, we define clinical nursing research as research conducted at the individual patient or client level, which includes at least one patient-related outcome. One integrative review examined only cancer nursing research (Maree and Schmollgruber, 2014); the other reviewed all nursing research (including organizational, policy-driven or pedagogical), limiting the ability to identify gaps in current clinical nursing research (Adejumo and Lekalakala-Mokgele, 2009). A scoping review allows for the mapping of a broad spectrum of research and can be used to inform future research (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005). Therefore, in order to assess the current state of clinical nursing research in African countries, a scoping review was conducted to describe clinical nursing and midwifery research being conducted across all 54 African countries.

2. Methods

2.1. Search strategy

A search strategy was developed with the assistance of a health sciences librarian at a large, urban university in the United States. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were determined *a priori* and iteratively throughout the search. Using a Boolean combination of keywords and medical subject headings, we searched OVID Medline, PubMed, CINAHL, and Embase for studies from the 2004 to 2014 that included clinical nursing research conducted in African countries. Because the previous review that included clinical research reviewed the literature between 1986 and 2006, we looked at literature between 2004 to the present to allow for some overlap for articles that may not have yet been indexed. Although including all African countries may limit the generalizability of the results, as suggested by the Cochrane group, a scoping review ought to be very broad as the intent is to determine the extent of a subject; therefore we chose to include all African countries. The complete search strategy for each electronic database is listed in Appendix 1.

2.2. Study selection

Inclusion criteria were (1) original research conducted in African countries, (2) by nurses and midwives (but not

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