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*Review of research and review articles
on community health nursing in USA*

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to identify the journals most cited in public health and community nursing and to determine which databases provide the most thorough indexing access to these journals. This study is part of the Medical Library Association Nursing and Allied Health Resource Section's project to map the nursing literature. Two source journals of public health nursing, *Public Health Nursing* and *Journal of Community Health Nursing*, were subjected to citation analysis based on Bradford's Law of Scattering. A group of 18 titles comprised 34% (1,387) of the 4,100 citations, another third were dispersed among 104 journal titles, with the remaining third scattered across 703 journal titles. The core 18 journals included both of the source journals, 3 major public health journals, and several general medical and nursing journals. PubMed provided the best overall indexing coverage for the journals, followed by Social Science Citation Index and CINAHL.

Keywords:

Community health nursing,

1. Introduction:

Public health nursing as a specialty in the nursing profession is currently defined as “the practice of promoting and protecting the health of populations using knowledge from nursing, social, and public health science”. The discipline of public health nursing officially emerged in the late 1800s in New York. Lillian D. Wald, a visiting district nurse who became a leader in public health nursing, was credited with first using this term to describe the expanding roles of the district nurse. She co-founded the National Organization for Public Health Nursing (NOPHN), the first national organization of its kind, in 1912 to set standards for public health nursing service and education. In 1952, NOPHN merged with the National League for Nursing (NLN). Today the American Nurses Credentialing Center offers certification exams for Community Health/Public Health nurses at the advanced practice level (Clinical Specialist in Community Health Nursing) and at the Baccalaureate level (Community Health Nurse). The Health Resources and Services Administration described the education and practice of community and public health nurses: in March 2004, 14.9% (n = 360,798) of RNs employed in nursing worked in public/community health settings, including state and local health departments, visiting nursing services and other health agencies, community health centers, student health services, occupational services and school health. Thus, community/public health nursing has developed from the early days of visiting homes to roles with community populations locally, nationally, and worldwide, with a continuing concern for disease prevention and health promotion.

This study of the public health nursing literature is part of the Nursing and Allied Health Resources Section of the Medical Library Association's project to map the literature of nursing, patterned after the effort to map the literature of allied health. The details of the study's methodology and inferences based on data supplied from this study appear in the overview article published in the April 2006 issue of the *Journal of the Medical Library Association*. No similar studies of the public health nursing literature appear to have been published. The public health nursing literature was briefly characterized in a paper by Ada M. Carr on the development of public health nursing literature in 1926; this paper was reprinted in 1988 in *Public Health Nursing*.

Based on the premise that the journal literature is a primary vehicle for communication between nursing research and practice, the purpose of this study was to identify the journals most cited in public health and community nursing and to determine which databases provide the most thorough indexing access to these journals. A secondary purpose is to determine the relative

frequency of cited format types and publication years. Since this mapping study relies on citations as reported by authors, it may be affected by error, but the extent has not been quantified for public health nursing journals. A study of the number and types of errors in references in four pediatric nursing journals showed that of the 190 references examined, 79 of them contained an error, for an overall error rate of 41.6% [9].

2. Methodology:

This study has followed the common methodology described in the project overview article. Variations from the methodology are noted. To select source journals for the study, the *Brandon/Hill Selected List of Nursing Books and Journals 1998/99* [10] and M. Allen's 1999 list *Key Nursing Journals: Characteristics and Database Coverage* [11] were consulted. Two relevant titles appeared on both lists: *Public Health Nursing* (PHN) and *Journal of Community Health Nursing* (JCHN). Allen's list noted that JCHN also appeared on the Canadian Nursing Association's 1997 *Suggested List of Periodicals for Nurses for the Canadian Health Science Library*. Both of these titles are essential core selections of the public health nursing subject component of the Core Public Health Journals list compiled by the Public Health/Health Administration Section of the Medical Library Association. Four of the sixteen mapping the Literature of Nursing studies used either one or two source journals.

The source years of the article reference lists examined from *Public Health Nursing* and *Journal of Community Health Nursing* were 1998–2000. *Public Health Nursing* began quarterly publication in 1984, increasing its frequency to bimonthly in 1994, with its goal of publishing articles relevant to public health nursing broadly construed to include all aspects of population-based care that are of interest to practitioners of public health nursing, educators, researchers, administrators, and policymakers. Articles may represent disciplines other than nursing provided that content is of potential benefit to public health nursing work. *Journal of Community Health Nursing* also began in 1984 and is published quarterly by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. JCHN focuses on health-care issues relevant to all aspects of community practice—schools, homes, visiting nursing services, clinics, hospices, education, and public health administration. The cited references in both journals are available and were retrieved from the Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL).

According to Bradford's Law of Scattering, “a relatively small core of journals can be expected to account for a disproportionate amount of the literature”. Journal titles were ranked in order of decreasing citations, and Bradford's Law was applied to mark 3 zones, with those journals

providing the top one-third of the citations comprising Zone 1 and the remaining thirds Zones 2 and 3, respectively. Database coverage scores were based on the following scale: 5 (95%–100%); 4 (75%–94%); 3 (50%–74%); 2 (25%–49%); 1 (1%–24%); 0 (<1%) and were averaged across the list of Zones 1 and 2 titles. Journal coverage percentages were calculated based on the highest number of articles indexed for 1998 by any of the databases. Note that this process resulted in lower scores for databases with indexing policies that might not include all types of articles; this limitation is discussed in the overview article.

3. Results:

A total of 224 articles and their 6,209 cited references from the 1998–2000 issues of the source journals were analyzed: 62 articles with 1,439 citations from *Journal of Community Health Nursing* and 162 articles with 4,770 citations from *Public Health Nursing*.

Table 1 shows that 66% (n = 4,100) of all the cited references were to journal articles, 22.5% (n = 1,399) were to books, 4.9% (n = 305) were to government documents, 1.4% (n = 87) to Internet sites, and the remaining 5.1% (n = 318) cited miscellaneous formats.

Table 1: Cited format types by source journal and frequency of citations

<i>No. of citations in source journals</i>				
Cited format type	JCHN	PHN	Total	Frequency (%)
Journal articles	959	3,141	4,100	(66)
Books	295	1,104	1,399	(22.5)
Government documents	86	219	305	(4.9)
Internet resources	39	48	87	(1.4)
Miscellaneous	60	258	318	(5.1)
Total	1,439	4,770	6,209	(99.9)+

JCHN = Journal of Community Health Nursing

PHN = Public Health Nursing

Table. 2 shows citation formats broken down by publication period. For all formats except Internet sites, items from 1992–1997 comprised the greatest percentage of citations: 56.3% (n = 2,309) of journal citations, 46.9% (n = 656) of book citations, 63% (n = 192) of government publications, and 63.2% (n = 201) of miscellaneous citations. Of the Internet sites, 65.5% (n = 57) dated from 1998 forward, when Internet use had become more common. There seems to be less reliance on the most recent literature in this specialty compared with the others mapped from 1998–2000 [7]; only 6.8% (n = 420) of citations in all formats dated from 1998 and beyond. Ninety-three percent (n = 5,775) of all citations in all formats were published in or after 1982.

Table. 2: Cited formed types by publication year periods.

<i>Publicati on year</i>	<i>Books (%)</i>		<i>Government documents (%)</i>		<i>Internet (%)</i>		<i>Journal articles (%)</i>		<i>Miscell aneous (%)</i>		<i>Total citations (%)</i>	
1998- Year*	66	4.7 %	18	5.9%	57	65.5 %	257	6.3%	22	6.9%	420	6.85
1992- 1997	656	46.9 %	192	62.9 %	29	33.3 %	2,309	56.3 %	201	63.2 %	3,387	54.5 %
1982- 1991	461	33 %	88	28.9 %	1	1.1%	1,339	32.7 %	79	24.8 %	1,968	31.7 %
1972- 1981	144	10.3 %	7	2.3%	0	0%	156	3.8%	13	4.1%	320	5.2%
1962- 1971	47	3.4 %	0	0	0	0%	33	0.8%	1	0.3%	81	1.3%
Pre-1962	25	1.8 %	0	0	0	0%	6	0.2%	1	0.3%	32	0.5%
Not available	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0	0	1	0.3%	1	0%
	1,39 9	100. 1%	305	100%	87	100%	4,100	100.1 %+	318	100%	6,209	100%

Table.3 shows title distribution by zone. Only 18 titles (2.2%) comprise Zone 1, but they accounted for over a third (33.8%) of all journal citations. An additional 104 titles (12.6%) fell into Zone 2 and accounted for almost another third (34.2%) of all journal references. The list of items in Zone 2 was extended because several journals tied with 7 cited references and therefore were included in the cutoff. The remaining 32% of the citations were scattered among 703 titles (85.1%). A total of 825 unique journal titles were cited; 422 of these titles were only represented by a single reference. The data here and in Table 4 vary slightly from the results presented in the overview study as some title changes were identified and consolidated after preliminary data were published.

Table. 3: Distribution by zone of cited journals and references

Cited journal references					
Cited journals					
Zone	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	Cumulative total
Zone 1	18	2.2%	1,387	33.8%	1,387
Zone 2	104	12.6%	1,400	34.2%	2,787
Zone 3	703	85.1%	1,313	32%	4,100
Total	825	99.9%+	4,100	100%	

+ Does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Table 4 (appears online only) shows the Zone 1 and 2 titles. Both source journals—*Public Health Nursing* and *Journal of Community Health Nursing*—appeared in Zone 1, ranking first and tenth, respectively. Zone 1 journals represented several disciplines: public health (*American Journal of Public Health*, *MMWR Morbidity & Mortality Weekly Report*, and *Public Health Reports*), general medicine (*JAMA*, *New England Journal of Medicine*, and *Pediatrics*), general nursing (*Nursing Research*, *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, and *ANS Advances in Nursing Science*), and social sciences (*The Gerontologist* and *Social Science & Medicine*). These twelve core titles, ranging from *Pediatrics* to *The Gerontologist*, represent the breadth of populations served in public health nursing.

Table 4 also shows indexing coverage scores for each Zone 1 and 2 journal in the 12 databases searched. No one indexing source provided comprehensive indexing coverage of the Zone 1 titles. PubMed provided the highest overall indexing score (3.37) for Zone 1 and 2 titles, but offered complete coverage for only *Public Health Nursing*. Social Science Citation Index had the second highest score for combined Zone 1 and 2 coverage (2.75), and offered complete coverage for 9 of the Zone 1 titles. CINAHL came in a close third with a score for Zone 1 and 2 coverage of 2.71 and complete coverage for 6 of the Zone 1 titles. EBSCO Nursing & Allied Health Collection Comprehensive Edition provided the only complete coverage for the *MMWR*.

4. Conclusion:

Many of the cited references analyzed in the study (66%, n = 4,100) were to journal articles, comparable to the percentage of journal citations in the other specialties covered by the nursing mapping studies. Most of all references analyzed (93%, n = 5,775) were to materials published since 1982, a finding typical of the nursing disciplines across all of the studies. However, reliance on the most recent references from 1998 onwards (6.8%, n = 420) was less than that in all but 2 of the other disciplines [7]. Consistent with Bradford's Law of Scattering, the study's cited journal titles were concentrated in a fairly small core, with 14.8% (n = 122) of the titles accounting for two-thirds of all the citations. The literature of public health is generally considered to be broad and multidisciplinary, and therefore the authors assumed that this multidisciplinary nature would be true in public health nursing as well. The dispersion of public health nursing references across 825 journals was, surprisingly, below the average of 993 across all 16 studies. The public health nursing title dispersion was in range of the other disciplines with 1 or 2 source journals (446–892 journal titles). Further research may consider how the dispersion was affected by the methodology.

Public health practice requires knowledge not only of the general public health literature but also of significant developments published in general medical and nursing journals and in journals in epidemiology, school health, and other related disciplines. Of the twelve databases searched for coverage of the Zone 1 and 2 titles (results from nine databases shown), PubMed (MEDLINE), Social Science Citation Index and CINAHL provided the most complete coverage. MEDLINE indexes all full-length articles and research reports as well as most letters, editorials, and commentaries. Social Science Citation Index provides cover-to-cover indexing,

but did not cover the *Journal of Community Health Nursing*. CINAHL provided the most complete coverage of nursing journals in the study.

For searchers needing comprehensive coverage of the literature referenced by public health nurses as represented by these two source journals, PubMed appears to be the first choice, closely followed by Social Science Citation Index and CINAHL. For the core literature of public health nursing, particularly the source journal *Journal of Community Health Nursing*, EMBASE (overall indexing score 1.47) should also be considered. Since few libraries serving public health nurses have access to EMBASE, it will be important to advocate for complete coverage of *Journal of Community Health Nursing* and other titles by more accessible databases. CINAHL may wish to index more of the public health and social science literature to increase the database's utility for nurses and public health practitioners, while MEDLINE could benefit from more in-depth coverage of nursing publications. Some of these changes may already have taken place since 1998, the year for which the databases were searched.

These results may be beneficial to librarians and public health nurses seeking to explore the breadth of public health nursing literature and provide justification for retaining older materials. Expanding nursing collections to include more of the core public health literature may help guide users to relevant materials.

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