

## **The Role of Physical Touch in Nursing and Nursing Education: An Integrative Review of Clinical and Psychosocial Outcomes**

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### **Citation**

Blomberg K, Öhman M, Eriksson M. Physical touch in nursing - experiences and how to learn: a systematic review. Study Protocol. Zenodo. <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4003857>

### **Background**

Physical touch is a basic need of all people, regardless of age or life situation. It can provide security, well-being and belonging. But negative perceived physical touch can generate emotions such as fear, vulnerability and perceived as violations. As a consequent of the #metoo movement in the fall of 2017, it's a risk that physical contact and especially physical touch are avoided by professions where it's central. For example, in the context of education, studies show that sports teachers in many countries have become more cautious and avoid having physical contact with students due not to being misinterpreted as negative touch (Fletcher, 2013; Öhman, 2016; Piper, Garratt & Taylor, 2013).

In healthcare, caregivers who use physical touch in their work with disabled and elderly people have also become insecure and worried that they may be misunderstood (Bergstrand, 2018). A review shows that healthcare professionals see physical touch as part of the work but want to be the initiator of the contact, not that it should be initiated by the patients (Kelly et al. 2018).

The use of physical touch in healthcare is also affected by the need to avoid contamination and widespread of infections agents, a question with extra relevance in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic.

There is currently a lack of knowledge about how physical touch is experienced and used. As a first step is to increase the knowledge and understanding of how physical touch is experienced and used in healthcare by mapping studies explored physical touch both in daily care but also from the perspective of nursing students. With increased knowledge, a basis for developing interventions/teaching modules can be generated.

### **Objective and Review question/s**

The objective of this integrative review is to summarize the knowledge regarding how physical touch is experienced and used in healthcare by mapping studies explored physical touch both in daily care but also from the perspective of nursing students. The research questions are:

1. How do nursing students and nurses perceive touch and the process of touching in their professional role?
2. How do nursing students and nurses learn to touch?

### **Keywords**

Healthcare, Nursing, Nursing students, Physical touch

## Methods

An integrative review with searches guided by the Cochrane methods (Higgins & Green, 2011) to assure comprehensive search methods, and by Whittermore & Knafl (2005) for a systematic approach to analysis of articles describing physical touch in the nursing context (nursing care and nursing education) will be performed.

## Inclusion criteria

### Participants

This systematic review will consider studies that include adult persons (+18 years of age), from the student, nurses' or patients' perspective. Studies describing interventions with therapeutic touching, measuring effects of touch, describing non-physical touch, i.e. mental or psychological touching and conducted in the paediatric healthcare (including children as study population) will be excluded.

### Concepts

The concept examined in this systematic review is physical touch used in daily care by nurses but also from the perspective of nursing students.

### Contexts

This integrative review will consider studies that have been conducted in the nursing context i.e. nursing care and nursing education.

### Study types

Empirical original studies using both quantitative and qualitative methodology will be included. Studies published in English in peer-reviewed journals up to June 2019.

## Search strategy

The search strategy aims to identify published empirical studies. A pilot search was taken in to identify key articles in order to find text words and index terms used in this area. An systematic search of the databases CINAHL, ERIC and Medline will be performed. Search terms (adjusted to the specific databases) that will be used are: Touch\* AND Physical touch (NOT Therapeutic touch), combined with keywords: Nurs\* AND Nursing students. An overview of the search strategy is presented in appendix 1.

## Selection of studies

The titles and abstract from the search will be screened by two independent researchers against the inclusion criteria, using Covidence systematic review software (Veritas Health Innovation, Melbourne, Australia). During the process of selection, meetings will be held among researchers to compare independent selections, resolve disagreements and make decisions. Full-text papers will be retrieved for all papers that screened positively in the first stage, and also reviewed independently by two researchers. These reviews will be followed by further discussion among researchers to inform inclusion into the final dataset. The search and selection process will be summarized in a PRISMA flow chart.

## Data extraction

Data will be extracted from articles included in this review to a MS Word form by two members of the research group. Any uncertainties will be discussed within the group. A quality control will be done by another member of the research group on 20% of the included articles.

The following data items will be collected from the included articles:

- Bibliographic details (lead author, title, journal, year + full citation).
- Design/methods, population, data collection, analysis
- A narrative description on how the research findings are addressed in the article.
- If plausible quotations will be collected.

The quality of the included studies will be assessed by two researchers (first and last authors), using the CASP-checklists (CASP) for the included study types. However, no articles will be excluded based on ratings of quality.

## Data mapping

The extracted data will be presented in text, both as narrative summary and in a matrix that corresponding to the aim of this review.

## Conflicts of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest.

## Funding

This study is done on the authors' research time funded by Örebro University, Faculty of Health and Medicine. Authors are members of the following research environments at Örebro University: CaC - Care about Caring (KB, ME), RISPA - Research in Sport and Physical Activity, and SMED - Studies of Meaning-making in Educational Discourses MÖ), and FAMN – The Child, the Family, the Caring system, the Society (KB, ME).

## References

Bergstrand J. Touch [Beröring]. Fokus. Mo Gård. 2018;13:2

CASP – Critical Appraisal Skills Programme <https://casp-uk.net/casp-tools-checklists/>

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Higgins, J., & Green, S. (Eds.). (2011). *Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions Version 5.1.0: The Cochrane Collaboration*.

Kelly MA, Nixon L, McClurg et al. Experience of Touch in Health Care: A Meta-Ethnography Across the Health Care Professions. *Qualitative Health Research*. 2018;28(2):200-212.

Piper Garratt & Taylor (2013) Child abuse, child protection and defensive 'touch' in PE teaching and sports coaching *Sport, Education and Society*. 2013;18:5, 583–598.<sup>[1]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>

Whittemore R, Knafl K. The integrative review: updated methodology. *J Adv Nurs*. 2005;52(5):546-53.

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## Appendix 1. Search strategy

- Touch\* AND Nurs\* NOT Therapeutic touch

Database	Limiters Applied
CINAHL Plus with Full Text	Peer Reviewed; Published Date: 20000101-20191231; Language: Danish, English; English Language
ERIC	Peer Reviewed; Published Date: 20000101-20191231; Language: Danish, English
MEDLINE	Peer Reviewed; Published Date: 20000101-20191231; Language: Danish, English