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Forensic nurses' mental well-being in handling cases insights from Jean Watson's caring theory: A scoping review

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Abstract

Background: Forensic nursing is a specialized field of nursing that plays a vital role in handling forensic cases involving both healthcare and legal aspects. In practice, forensic nurses are confronted with complex situations that require strong clinical, emotional, and ethical competencies. Jean Watson's Theory of Caring is considered a relevant framework to support forensic nurses in delivering holistic and humanistic care.

Purpose: To map the existing scientific evidence related to forensic nurses' experiences in managing forensic cases through the application of Jean Watson's Theory of Caring.

Method: A scoping review was conducted by searching the literature through Google Scholar and PubMed databases. Articles were selected based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, published between 2018 and 2024, and relevant to forensic nurses' experiences and the application of caring theory. The article selection process followed the PRISMA-ScR guidelines.

Results: The findings indicated that the application of Jean Watson's Theory of Caring in forensic nursing contributes to improved therapeutic relationships, enhanced emotional support, and fulfillment of patients' holistic needs. The experiences of forensic nurses reflect significant psychological, ethical, and professional challenges; however, these challenges can be managed through the consistent application of a caring approach.

Conclusion: Jean Watson's Theory of Caring plays an important role in forensic nursing practice. This scoping review highlights the need to strengthen forensic nurses' caring competencies to support care delivery that is grounded in humanistic values and justice.

Keywords: Forensic Nursing; Jean Watson Caring Theory; Nurse Experience; Scoping Review.

INTRODUCTION

Forensic nurses have a crucial role in the investigation of death and crime cases that require precision, accuracy, as well as high physical and mental endurance. Optimal physical condition enables them to perform critical tasks effectively, while psychological readiness is necessary to cope with work situations characterized by pressure and potential trauma. Therefore, the ability to perform self-care becomes an important aspect so that forensic nurses can recognize and manage stress arising in high-risk work environments. In addition, spiritual

readiness also plays a role in maintaining emotional balance and inner peace, allowing forensic nurses to carry out their duties with empathy, integrity, and high professionalism while avoiding emotional exhaustion (burnout), which is common in forensic work (Kirana, Martyastuti, Lestari, Achjar, Nuryanti, Gama, & Mustika, 2023).

Forensic nurses play an important role in bridging the medical and legal domains, particularly when dealing with patients who are victims of violence, sexual assault, or unnatural death. In the context of

modern nursing practice, technical competence in forensic evidence collection must be accompanied by the ability to provide care based on empathy, respect for human dignity, and patients' psychological recovery. This approach is aligned with the Caring Theory of Jean Watson, which emphasizes the importance of the transpersonal relationship between nurse and patient as the core of humanistic nursing practice (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2019). Watson's Human Caring Theory states that human beings should not be treated and cared for as objects, and nurses must pay attention to the client's mind, body, and soul. In this theory, the environment is defined as a calming, beautiful, and comfortable place, and care has a spiritual aspect related to the engagement of mind, soul, and body, working together effectively. The theory aims to ensure harmony between an individual's experiences of health and illness and emphasizes a holistic approach to human care (Taheri-Ezbarami, Ghanbari, Panahi, & Pouy, 2023).

Several studies indicate that the application of caring principles in the forensic context can help victims of violence feel valued and become more cooperative during examination processes (Rahmawati, Halimah, Karmawan, & Setiawan, 2024). On the other hand, nurses often face ethical dilemmas and psychological pressure due to conflicts between empathetic patient needs and rigid legal procedural demands (Hidayah & Abidin, 2018). This highlights that the experience of forensic nurses not only includes technical aspects but also reflects the struggle of values and emotions in maintaining balance between professional duties and humanity. Although studies on the application of Watson's theory in general nursing practice are quite numerous, specific research linking it to the experiences of forensic nurses in hospitals remains limited. Most forensic nurses have not fully understood the application of transpersonal caring values in forensic situations, particularly when interacting with severely traumatized victims (Farizal & Nursanti, 2024). Meanwhile, other studies highlight the lack of emotional support and continuous training, which makes it difficult for nurses to apply caring theory consistently (Fadila, Safriani, Eliana, & Khaddafi, 2025).

Many nurses experience stigma and discrimination when providing care to patients;

therefore, a holistic approach based on empathy and active listening can improve nurse-patient relationships. A competent forensic nurse must possess knowledge of forensic autopsy procedures and strong professional abilities to compete with nurses from other countries. Therefore, these nurses must be intelligent, communicative, and understand international standards. They also need to continuously improve their knowledge and skills (Rahmayani, 2020). Forensic nurses perform several activities to maintain their physical health, such as regular exercise, vitamin consumption, adequate sleep, use of personal protective equipment during work, and efforts to avoid stress. They also experience job satisfaction, undergo routine medical check-ups, implement healthy diets, and remain cautious to prevent injuries at work. From a psychological perspective, forensic nurses build emotional resilience, maintain effective communication skills, demonstrate empathy toward patients, seek psychological support, preserve mental health, and maintain self-calmness. They also take vacation time to relax. Spiritually, forensic nurses pray and seek inner peace (Im, Pyo, Lee, Jung, & Ock, 2023).

Levels of stress, anxiety, and depression among forensic nurses can decrease significantly when they receive strong social support from family, colleagues, and professional environments. In addition, resilience functions as a protective factor that enables forensic nurses to adapt positively to workplace pressures and challenges. These findings emphasize the need for interventions focused on strengthening social support and resilience to prevent emotional exhaustion and improve the psychological well-being of forensic nurses (Firmansyah Zakiah, & Basuki, 2023). A research gap emerges from the limited in-depth exploration of how forensic nurses experience and interpret caring practices when handling forensic cases in hospital environments characterized by pressure and resource limitations. Most previous studies have focused more on technical aspects of evidence collection and case management rather than on the humanistic and reflective dimensions of nurses' experiences (Emami, Lynch, & Banazadeh, 2024).

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RESEARCH METHOD

A scoping review was systematically designed to identify and map scientific evidence relevant to the experiences of forensic nurses in managing forensic cases through the application of Jean Watson's Caring Theory. The literature search process was conducted in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) guidelines to ensure transparency and reproducibility of the review process. Literature searching was carried out through two major electronic databases, namely Google Scholar and PubMed, as both databases provide broad coverage of scientific publications in nursing and health sciences, including forensic nursing and caring theory. The search strategy used a combination of keywords in English and Indonesian adapted to Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) terms, including forensic nursing, forensic nurse experience, Jean Watson caring theory, human caring, forensic nursing experience, and Jean Watson's caring theory. Keywords were combined using Boolean operators AND and OR to broaden and refine the search results. The literature search was limited to articles published between 2018 and 2024 to ensure the novelty and relevance of the research findings. Additionally, the search was restricted to full-text articles written in either Indonesian or English.

All articles retrieved from the search were subsequently screened through several stages, including duplicate removal, title and abstract screening, and full-text eligibility assessment based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Articles that met the inclusion criteria were then analysed and mapped to describe study characteristics, research focus, and key findings related to forensic nurses' experiences and the application of Jean Watson's Caring Theory in forensic nursing practice. The article selection process followed the PRISMA-ScR flow. All articles identified in the initial stage were compiled and screened based on titles and abstracts. Articles deemed relevant were then reviewed in full text to ensure compliance with the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria were primary research articles employing qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods designs that discussed forensic nurses' experiences or the application of caring theory within the context of forensic nursing. The exclusion criteria included review articles, editorials, opinion papers, and publications that were not available in full text. The article selection process consisted of the identification stage, title and abstract screening, full-text eligibility assessment, and final inclusion according to the PRISMA-ScR framework.

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RESEARCH RESULTS

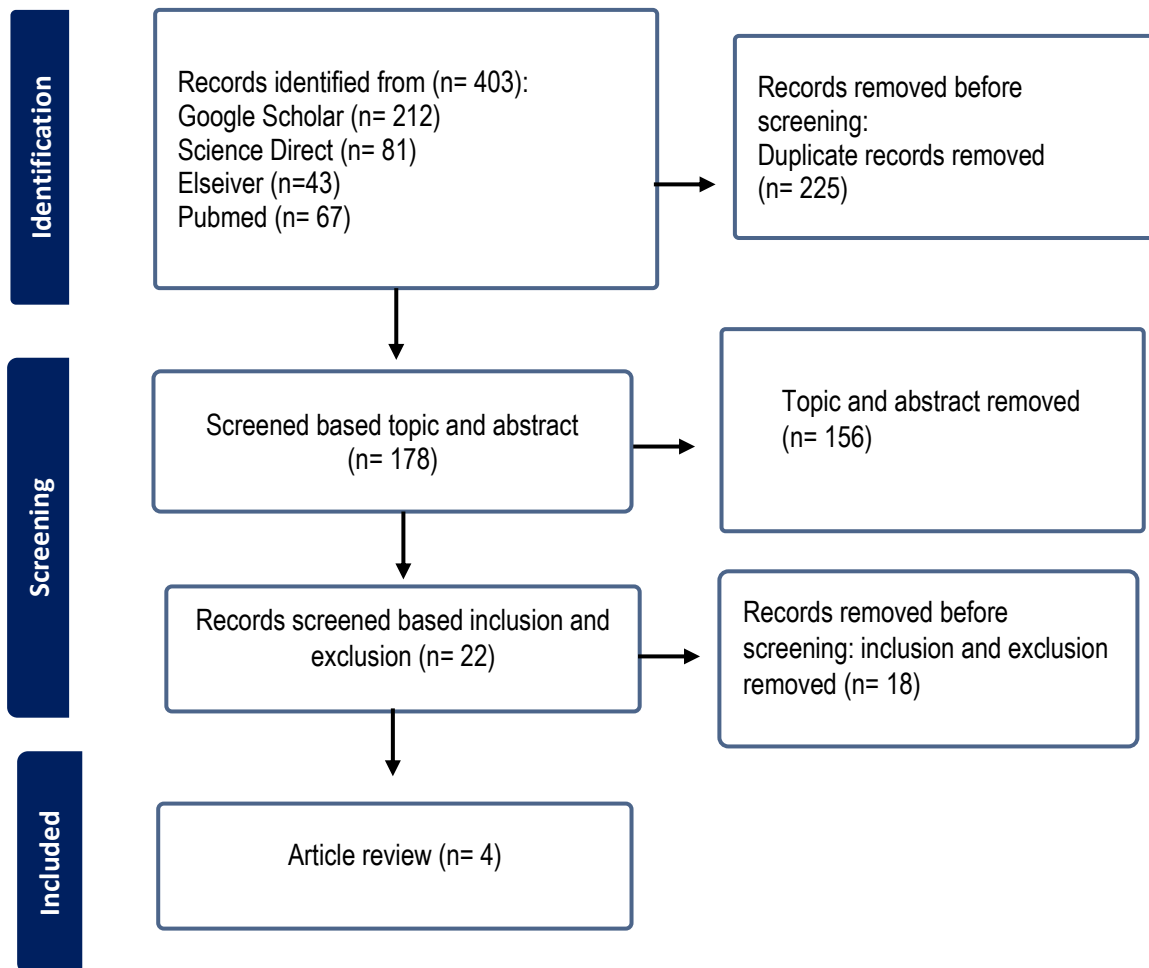


Figure. Diagram Prisma Flow

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Table. Article Review

(Author, Year) (Country)	Purpose	Method	Results
(Sulistiawan, 2025) (Indonesia)	To determine the effectiveness of health interventions in improving patient behaviour or clinical outcomes.	Analytical study with a cross-sectional approach using structured questionnaires.	The intervention significantly improved respondents' knowledge and health behaviours compared to before the intervention.
(Farizal & Nursanti, 2024) (Indonesia)	To analyse the relationship between behavioural or educational factors and patients' health conditions.	Analytical study with a cross-sectional approach using structured questionnaires.	There was a significant relationship between behavioural/educational variables and patients' health conditions or adherence.
(Firmansyah, Zakiyah, & Basuki, 2023) (Indonesia)	To evaluate the implementation of a health program or intervention in a specific patient group.	Mixed-method or quasi-experimental design with pre- and post-intervention measurements.	The intervention program had a positive impact on improving health outcomes, such as disease control or quality of life
(Sismanto & Nursanti, 2024) (Indonesia)	To identify factors influencing patients' health or disease self-management.	To identify factors influencing patients' health behaviour or disease self-behaviour management.	Knowledge, attitudes, and social support were important factors in improving patients' self-management behaviour.

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DISCUSSION

The results of the scoping review indicate that the experiences of forensic nurses in handling forensic cases constitute complex and multidimensional professional experiences (Rathore & Patwa, 2020). Forensic nurses are not only required to possess clinical competence but also strong psychological, emotional, ethical, and communication abilities. They occupy a strategic position that connects healthcare services with the legal system (Renjith, Nikitha, George, Mhalkar, & Raju, 2016). In practice, forensic nurses frequently encounter victims of sexual violence, domestic violence, child and elder neglect, as well as other criminal cases. These situations place forensic nurses in work conditions with high emotional pressure, especially when dealing with patients experiencing both physical and psychological trauma simultaneously. Forensic nurses face challenges related to physical, psychological, and spiritual readiness in carrying out their roles (Sulistiawan, 2025). In addition, they also encounter ethical and professional dilemmas, such as maintaining objectivity in evidence collection, protecting patients' rights and dignity, and complying with applicable legal procedures. This role complexity positions forensic nurses not only as care providers but also as professionals who must balance empathy with legal responsibility (Afiyanti, 2018).

This scoping review demonstrates that the Caring Theory of Jean Watson has strong relevance in forensic nursing practice. The theory emphasizes humanistic values, empathy, sensitivity, and meaningful interpersonal relationships between nurses and patients. In the forensic nursing context, a caring approach becomes particularly important because patients are generally in vulnerable and traumatic conditions and require a sense of safety as well as emotional support. The application of caring in forensic nursing helps nurses build therapeutic relationships based on trust and respect for human dignity. Jean Watson's Caring Theory provides a strong conceptual framework to support holistic and human-oriented nursing practice, including in complex and high-pressure situations such as forensic cases (Sismanto & Nursanti, 2024). Caring values, such as sensitivity to patients' feelings, support for the expression of both positive and negative emotions, and the creation of a safe and supportive

environment, have been shown to assist patients in their physical and psychological recovery processes. This aligns with the concept of carative factors in Jean Watson's theory, which positions humans as holistic beings with physical, psychological, social, and spiritual needs. The review findings indicate that the application of Jean Watson's Caring Theory contributes significantly to improving the quality of therapeutic relationships between forensic nurses and patients. Relationships developed through a caring approach allow patients to feel valued, heard, and protected, even within legal situations that often create anxiety and fear (Chinyere & Val, 2023).

There is a gap between the roles performed by forensic nurses and their perceptions of the importance of caring in clinical practice. However, when the caring approach is applied consistently, forensic nurses are able to perform their roles in a more meaningful and professional manner (Noprianty & Karana, 2019). This indicates that caring is not merely an emotional aspect but also an integral part of the quality of forensic nursing services. The caring approach also plays a role in maintaining the emotional balance of forensic nurses. Caring helps nurses sustain emotional resilience and reduce the impact of work-related stress, particularly in crisis situations. Thus, caring is beneficial not only for patients but also for nurses' psychological well-being (Creswell, 2024).

Despite its significant benefits, the implementation of caring in forensic nursing also faces various challenges. Psychological challenges arise due to repeated exposure to cases of violence, trauma, and human suffering. These conditions have the potential to cause emotional exhaustion and high work stress if not managed properly. From an ethical and professional perspective, forensic nurses must maintain a balance between empathy and objectivity. They are required to provide emotional support to patients without neglecting principles of justice, confidentiality, and legal procedures. Forensic nurses serve as a bridge between healthcare services and the justice system, thereby requiring strong ethical and professional competence (Curcio, Lommi, Zambrano Bermeo, Esteban-Burgos, Pucciarelli, & Avilés González, 2024).

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The Jean Watson caring approach helps forensic nurses address these challenges by instilling values of self-reflection, moral awareness, and respect for human dignity. Through this approach, forensic nurses can continue to provide humanistic care without compromising professional and legal responsibilities. The findings of this scoping review have important implications for the development of forensic nursing practice and education. The application of Jean Watson's Caring Theory needs to be strengthened through education, training, and healthcare institutional policies so that forensic nurses possess adequate caring competencies to address the complexity of forensic practice. Furthermore, healthcare institutions are expected to provide psychological support and a conducive work environment for forensic nurses. This is essential to maintain nurses' well-being while also improving the quality of forensic nursing care oriented toward humanistic values and justice (Dharma, 2021).

CONCLUSION

A forensic nurse's experience in handling forensic cases is greatly influenced by their ability to apply a caring approach. Jean Watson's Caring Theory plays a crucial role in improving the quality of forensic nursing care and maintaining human values within the context of legally oriented services.

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