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Instruments on ethical conflicts in nursing practice – A systematic methodological review protocol

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ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Support - DPNurs, University of Turku.

Review Stage at time of this submission - Preliminary searches.

Conflicts of interest - None known.

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Amendments - This protocol was registered with the International Platform of Registered Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (INPLASY) on 18 April 2026 and was last updated on 18 April 2026.

INTRODUCTION

Study aim The aim of the study is to describe and analyse the existing instruments on ethical conflicts in nursing practice. The purpose of the study is to gather the scientific evidence regarding measurement of ethical conflict in nursing practice, to support the study of outcomes. The research questions are as follows:

1. Which instruments measure ethical conflicts in nursing practice?
2. What is the content and structure of these instruments?
3. What is the reported level of validity and reliability of these instruments?

Background Nursing is a value-based profession, guided by ethical guidelines. However, the values do not always align, and ethical conflicts are frequently experienced in nursing practice contexts. Ethical conflicts are recurring to their nature and through empirical ethics, instruments measuring these conflicts have been developed.

Rationale A systematic review of instruments on ethical conflicts in nursing practice could contribute to a deeper understanding of how the multifaceted and abstract concept of ethical conflict can be measured within this context.

METHODS

Search strategy The data search will be two-folded, including an initial and complementary data search. The initial data search will be conducted in three electronic databases: CINAHL, PubMed and Web of Science in April 2026. The data search comprises search terms to identify instruments regarding ethical conflicts in nursing practice, based on key terms and their synonyms

Search strings are composed using free terms and MeSH terms combined with Boolean operators with an information specialist prior to a systematic data search. All references will be sought with no limitations on publication time. The data search will be limited to include the words in the title or

abstract and articles written in the English, Finnish or Swedish. The complementary data search is conducted in the reference lists of articles selected in the initial data search. The data search will be reported according to the PRISMA guidelines.

Eligibility criteria This review examines instruments on ethical conflicts in nursing practice. In this study ethical conflict is defined as a situation with two or more conflicting values, that creates moral tension. Nurses are defined as educated authorised professionals, who are guided by ethical codes and standards of practice, and nursing practice how the professional values and skills of nurses are realized in the care of patients. Finally, research instrument is defined as a tool, constructed by researchers for collecting data and measuring the subject of interest subjectively or objectively

Inclusion and exclusion criteria for the information sources are set regarding study type, type of instrument, informants and language. The included study types are empirical studies describing the development, psychometric testing or use of the instruments. Reviews will be excluded. The types of instruments that are included are instruments measuring ethical conflicts in nursing practice. Instruments regarding values without conflict or healthcare policy level ethical conflicts, will be excluded.

Studies where the informants are educated nurses (registered nurse, public health nurse, midwife, advanced practice nurse, licensed practical nurse) will be included. Studies where the informants work in other roles (nurse leaders, nurse managers) or have other/ongoing education (allied health professionals, nurse students) will be excluded. Regarding language, articles written in English, Finnish or Swedish will be included.

Data extraction The references of the initial data search are exported to Covidence, where duplicates will be removed automatically. References are then screened in accordance with PRISMA guidelines. Based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria set for the review, the references are screened on a title/abstract level by two researchers individually. Conflicts are resolved through discussion within the research group.

The full texts of included references are then sought, and full text screening is conducted in the same manner as on title/abstract level. Included articles will be divided according to used instruments, and instruments will be divided

between the research group for data extraction and complementary data search.

The complementary data search and data extraction is conducted by one researcher individually and verified by another researcher. Data will be extracted with a data extraction tool in Excel, developed and tested by the research group. With the data extraction tool data items regarding instrument information, instrument use in nursing practice and instrument validity and reliability will be gathered (listed below).

Instrument information

- Descriptive information (developer, year, instrument name, versions, language availability)

- Content

- Structure

- Measurement

Instrument use in nursing practice

- Number of publications and years when published

- Countries were used

- Study contexts

- Sample sizes

- Results

- Permission to use or copyright holder

- Ethics

- Limitations

Instrument validity and reliability

- Validity evaluated

- Reliability evaluated

- Instrument development and psychometric testing published in article.

Outcome definitions Review outcomes will be a description of instruments on ethical conflicts in nursing practice, their usability as well as their validity and reliability.

Strategy of data synthesis / Statistical analysis

The gathered data will be analysed inductively. Information about individual instruments, their use in nursing practice and their validity and reliability will be described in tables and in writing.

Country(ies) involved Finland.

Other relevant information The methodological quality of included studies will not be appraised. Validity and reliability will be assessed according to criteria set by Zwakhalen et al. (2006). If there are several versions of an instrument, the latest version will be assessed if it replaces the original version of the instrument.

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the Doctoral Programme in Nursing Science (DPNurs) at the University of Turku.

Keywords Ethical conflicts, Nurse, Nursing practice, Instrument.

Dissemination plans The results of the review will be published in an international peer reviewed journal in English.

Contributions of each author

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