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An Integrative Review of the Needs of Families of Patients Hospitalized in Intensive Care Units

Ali Mirkheshti , Amirhossein Hakimi , Fatemeh Ataei

(1) Nursing Student, Nursing and Midwifery Sciences Development Research Center, Najafabad Branch, Islamic Azad University, Najafabad, Iran



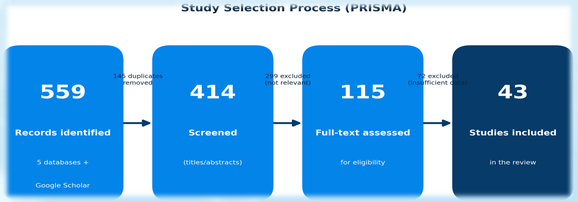
Graphical Abstract

Background

ICU hospitalization of a family member is a critical and unexpected event that causes anxiety, fear, and helplessness. The stressful ICU environment, restricted visiting, and complex patient conditions create significant psychosocial challenges for families. Unmet family needs may lead to anxiety, depression, dissatisfaction with care, and decision-making conflict. Family-centered care, including effective nurse communication, structured information, family presence, and psychological and spiritual support, is essential.

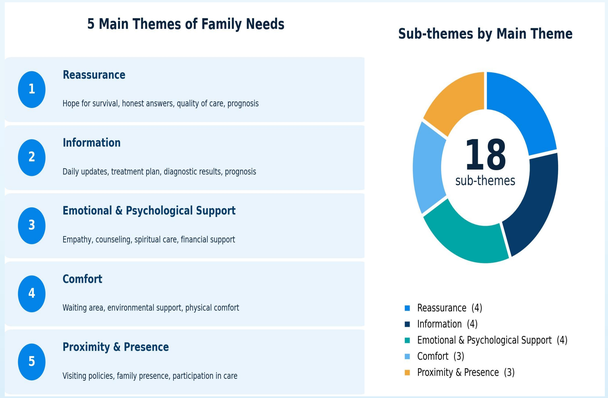
Method

Design: Integrative review (2015–2025).
Databases: PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, SID, MagIran, and Google Scholar.(supplementary source)
Keywords: Family, Needs, Intensive Care Unit, Critical Care, Family-Centered Care.
Screening: 559 records identified; 43 studies included after independent screening by three researchers.
Analysis: Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis.



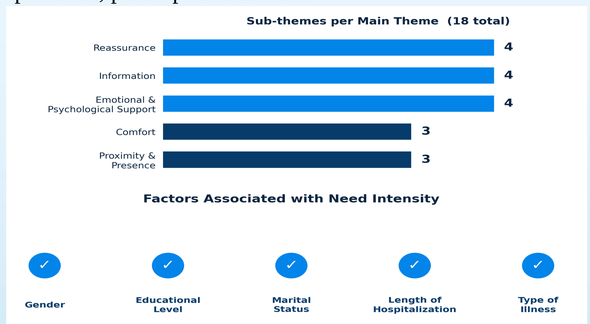
Findings

Thematic analysis of 43 studies identified five main themes and 18 sub-themes of family needs:



Need patterns were largely consistent across countries. However, nurses systematically underestimated family needs, particularly for information and reassurance, reflecting a persistent perceptual gap between families and the healthcare team.

1. **Reassurance:** hope for survival, honest answers, quality of care, prognosis.
2. **Information:** daily updates, treatment plan, diagnostic results, prognosis.
3. **Emotional & Psychological Support:** empathy, counseling, spiritual care, financial support.
4. **Comfort:** waiting area, environmental support, physical comfort.
5. **Proximity & Presence:** visiting policies, family presence, participation in care.



Gender, educational level, marital status, length of hospitalization, and type of illness were significantly associated with need intensity. Neglecting these needs was linked to family anxiety and depression, dissatisfaction with care, decision-making conflict, and greater burden on staff.

Conclusion

Family-centered care in the ICU is essential, strengthening nurses' communication skills, delivering structured information, facilitating family presence and participation, and providing psychological and spiritual support. Since nurses often underestimate these needs, targeted in-service training is recommended to reduce family anxiety, increase satisfaction, and improve care outcomes.



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