Spirituality and Aromatherapy in Palliative Care: A Systematic Review on Enhancing Well-Being

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1 Introduction

Spirituality plays a crucial role in the holistic care of patients, particularly in the context of palliative care, where the focus extends beyond physical symptoms to encompass emotional, social and spiritual well-being. In recent years, there has been **growing recognition of the significance of spirituality in palliative care settings**, with an increasing number of studies exploring its impact on patient outcomes and quality of life. **Aromatherapy**, characterised by using aromatic plant extracts and essential oils, has emerged as a **complementary therapy in palliative care**, offering potential benefits for symptom management and overall well-being.

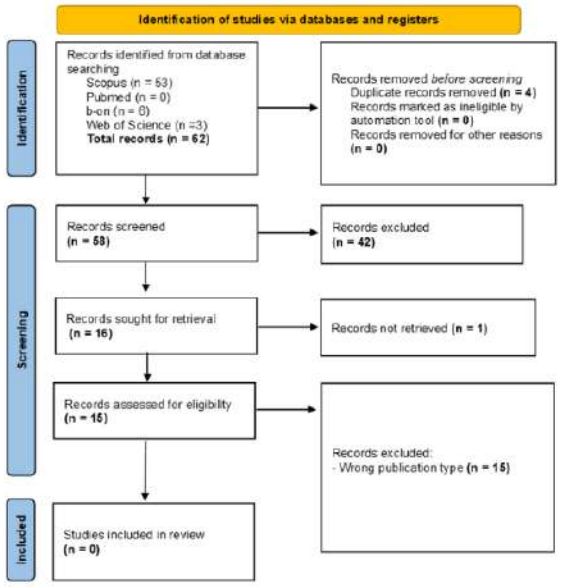
While there is a substantial body of research examining the physiological and psychological effects of aromatherapy in various clinical settings, its relationship with spirituality within palliative care remains relatively underexplored. This gap in the literature is notable considering the interconnectedness of spirituality and end-of-life care, where patients often seek meaning, comfort, and transcendence amid their illness journey.

2 Aim

This systematic review aims to address this gap by synthesising existing evidence on aromatherapy interventions in the context of spirituality within palliative care. By systematically examining the available literature, we seek to elucidate the role of aromatherapy in supporting spiritual well-being among palliative care patients, identify gaps in current research, and provide recommendations for future studies and clinical practice. The review protocol is registered on PROSPERO (registration number CRD42023488377).

3 Methods

- Four databases: b-on, PubMed, Web of Science and Scopus
- Peer-reviewd literature with no limitation of a year rage or language
- Inclusion: Patients aged ⩾ 18 years in a palliative care setting, involving aromatherapy as an intervention with outcomes related to spirituality
- Risk of bias: the Cochrane Collaboration's ROBINS-I tool



The entire search process is summarised in Figure 1, employing the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA)

4 Results

- An initial total of **62 articles**
- Removal of duplicates resulted in a preliminary range of 58 unique articles
- Refinement of relevant studies based on title and abstract produced a set of 16 articles
- One report based on titles and abstracts was not retrieved during the screening process due to inaccessibility to the full text
- Elimination of records not eligible due to wrong publication prodcued **zero** articles.

5 Discussion

- Absence of eligible studies in the systematic review offers meaningful insights for future research.
- Intersection of spirituality, palliative care, and aromatherapy is a relatively new area of interest.
- Existing research typically focuses on aromatherapy's physical and emotional benefits (pain relief, anxiety reduction) rather than its spiritual implications.
- **Spirituality is subjective and multifaceted**, making it difficult to measure scientifically, which might discourage research on its connection to aromatherapy.
- Cultural and regional differences in understanding spirituality hinder consensus on studying its role in palliative care.

6 Future Directions

- Explore a broader range of complementary therapies and their spiritual impacts on palliative care.
- Use qualitative research methods (e.g., interviews, focus groups) to capture personal experiences of spirituality in palliative care.
- Interdisciplinary collaboration (palliative care, psychology, theology, complementary medicine) could enhance study design and interpretation.
- Develop and validate standardized tools to measure spiritual well-being and aromatherapy's impact.
- Conduct pilot studies to address challenges and refine methodologies before larger-scale research.

7 Conclusion

- There is a significant gap in literature concerning the role of aromatherapy in addressing spirituality within palliative care.
- Absence of eligible studies highlights the need for more targeted research in this interdisciplinary field.
- Future research should overcome identified challenges to explore how aromatherapy supports spiritual well-being in palliative care.
- Addressing these gaps can help develop holistic and culturally sensitive approaches to end-of-life care.
- Ultimately, this research can enhance the quality of life for palliative care patients by integrating spiritual support.

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