



History of Family Nursing in Japan: A Perspective from Case Studies

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Abstract

Background: Family nursing in Japan has undergone significant development over the past three decades, shaped by cultural, societal, and demographic transformations. Case studies have played a crucial role in advancing the field, offering profound insights into family dynamics, patient care, and the evolving needs of Japanese families.

Objective: This article examines the historical evolution of family nursing in Japan, highlights the contributions of case studies to its progress, and identifies key themes from domestic literature.

Methods: A comprehensive review of Japanese academic literature and case studies was conducted using the Ichushi-Web database. Trends in family nursing research and the role of case studies in shaping clinical practice were analyzed over three decades, focusing on the field's response to diverse family needs.

Results: Since the 1990s, family nursing in Japan has progressed from adopting North American theories to developing culturally tailored approaches. Key milestones include the establishment of the Japanese Association for Research in Family Nursing (JARN), the introduction of Certified Nurse Specialists in Family Health Nursing, and an increasing emphasis on case studies. These studies have provided critical insights into areas such as pediatric care, end-of-life support, and home healthcare, reflecting the growing diversity of family forms and functions in Japan.

Conclusion: Family nursing in Japan represents a unique integration of traditional values and modern healthcare practices. Case studies remain vital for understanding family dynamics, addressing emerging societal challenges, and shaping the future of family nursing. Continued emphasis on case study research will enhance evidence-based, culturally responsive practices to meet the needs of Japan's evolving families.

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Introduction

Nursing encompasses autonomous and collaborative care of individuals of all ages, families, groups, and communities, sick or well and in all settings [1] (International Council of Nurses, 2002). As indicated by this definition, nurses inspect individuals, families, groups, and communities to understand the conditions and characteristics of their subjects and provide care tailored to these subjects. After the practice, they reflect on the care provided and make efforts to apply what they have learned in the next step. Thus, nursing can be seen as a profession that grows through providing care to its subjects.

In this process, case studies are considered one of the most valuable research methods for advancing nursing, as they allow for detailed analysis and reflection on both the nursing subjects and care provided. In fact, case studies are widely used as a means of nursing development and nurse training because they foster critical thinking, metacognition, and improve practical skills [2]. In this context, currently in Japan, the efforts of Yamamoto [3] have led to a growing interest in learning from practical clinical knowledge, leading to numerous case studies being reported on the families of patients. Therefore, in this article, we aim to consider a comprehensive view of family nursing in Japan based on domestic literature and case studies.

Development of Family Nursing in Japan

According to "The Trajectory and Future of Family Nursing" published by the Japanese Association for Research in Family Nursing (hereafter referred to as JARN) [4], after the first International Family Nursing Conference was held in 1988, the Department of Family Nursing was established in 1992 at the University of Tokyo and

Chiba University, Japan. Subsequently, JARN was established in 1994. In 1999, an educational program for Certified Nurse Specialist in Family Health Nursing (hereafter referred to as FCNS) was introduced. These events led to the gradual spread of family nursing in Japan. At a time when the term "family nursing" was rare, he began by incorporating North American family nursing theory [5]. JARN and the International Family Nursing Association have a strong relationship. In 2011, the 10th International Family Nursing Conference was held in Japan. Abstracts continue to be still exchanged between the Journal of Family Nursing and JARN. In 2024, JARN will hold its 31st Annual Conference with approximately 1,500 members of JARN and more than 90 members of FCNSs actively engaged in family nursing practice, education, and research. Thus, family nursing has developed significantly in Japan over the past 30 years and has contributed to the quality of life of many patients and their families.

Research is one of the major contributors to the development of family nursing. When we searched for references related to family nursing using a search engine (hereinafter referred to as Ichushi-Web), which covers all academic papers from domestic fields including

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medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, nursing, and related areas, we found approximately 23,000 reports published over the past 30 years, including research studies, conference abstracts, and magazine commentaries (Table 1). The number of references related to family nursing was only 10 in 1994 when JARFN was established. However, by 2004, the number had reached 924 and has remained around 1,000 since then. Since case studies were included in the paper category of Ichushi-Web only after 2011, when case reports began to be classified as case studies, there were only a few reports that could be called case studies before 2010. However, the number of case study reports has increased dramatically since 2011, with more than 150 cases being reported annually thereafter. In addition, when examining journals that have published literature related to family nursing, we found a dramatic increase in the number of journals over the past 30 years, indicating that family nursing is a discipline required across multiple fields.

The Transition of Family Nursing in Japan Through Case Studies

To obtain a comprehensive overview of areas of high interest in Japan based on literature related to family nursing, we analyzed keywords (excluding family nursing) from the retrieved literature every five years since 1994 using KH Coder (Table 2). We considered the transition of family nursing in Japan by presenting the aggregate results and case studies published during this period.

In the decade since 1994, many terms such as “nursing research” and “family relations” have been extracted, and we are still in the process of exploring what family nursing entails. Although there are not many case reports from this period, some have been reported, such as nursing children with chronic illnesses and families of patients with alcoholism [6, 7]. These cases are being discussed now, because even before family nursing became widespread, a family-centered approach involving mothers, fathers, and siblings was considered important in pediatric nursing. In addition, during that period in Japan, addiction to alcohol, gambling, and shopping was rapidly increasing. It can also be assumed that these circumstances had a significant impact on the stability of a family.

“Pediatric nursing” has been one of the most frequently cited keywords since 2000. Case studies have reported various conditions and situations, such as nursing care for the changing psychological state of parents of sick children [8] and support for children in

learning to care for themselves [9]. Several case studies on decision-making for treatment selection can be found among these. In Japan, with the development of neonatal and pediatric medicine, saving the lives of infants in critical condition has become possible. However, the choice of treatment for the child’s future is often left to the family, a situation that can be considered burdensome for the family. Some case studies have described nursing and family changes in this challenging proxy decision-making over time, from admission to end-of-life care [10]. In recent years, when shared decision-making has been considered important, this study is very valuable in understanding how nurses actually assist with surrogate decision-making in clinical practice.

In addition, the term “cancer nursing” gradually increased in the 2000s. In Japan, cancer has been the leading cause of death since 1981 and remains the same to this day. There is much interest in nursing care to support such cancer patients and their families at the end of life, and several case studies have been reported. Family nursing includes assistance in repeatedly negotiating and realizing the wishes of the patient and family in the time remaining at the end of life [11], assistance in encouraging discharge to home while taking into consideration the wishes and concerns of the family [12], and nursing considering the wishes of the patient and family while confronting the complex situation at the end of life. In addition, more and more end-of-life care has been provided in the community in recent years, and there are scattered examples of support for such transitions to home.

Regarding support for transitioning to home, it is not limited to only cancer patients. Kajio et al. [13] revealed the experiences of children who have parents in need of care. As Japan’s population ages, more and more families are taking on the responsibility of caring for elderly people requiring nursing care, and increasingly, their children, rather than their spouses, are taking on this responsibility. The recent increase in the number of times the term “home health care nursing” has been cited reflects the influence of such an aging society. As the aging rate continues to rise in the future, it will be necessary to keep addressing this as a major issue in family nursing.

Nursing Care Supports Diverse Family Structures

Family nursing is based on understanding the family’s structure and function, which then leads to appropriate assistance. A Japanese family is characterized by a clear line drawn between family members and others, and there is a historical tendency for family bonds to be strong, both positively and negatively [14].

Year	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Total number of references	10	42	17	27	30	20	40	135	324	742
Number of Case Studies	0	2	0	3	0	0	0	6	7	3
Year	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Total number of references	924	875	915	1074	1417	982	1187	1055	1294	1186
Number of Case Studies	4	2	3	2	3	1	4	197	204	207
Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total number of references	1163	1261	1337	1032	1101	1236	945	883	1030	929
Number of Case Studies	197	240	297	227	196	259	165	159	178	171

Table 1: Number of Reference and Case Studies on Family Nursing in Japan.

Note 1: A search was conducted on the Igaku Chuo Zasshi website using the keyword “family nursing.” References that did not include the term “family” in the subject, keywords, or abstract and, therefore, did not provide any insight into support for families or theories of family nursing were excluded.

Note 2: Case studies included research papers, case reports, conference abstracts, and commentaries.

1994–1998		1999–2003		2004–2008		2009–2013		2014–2018		2019–2023	
Keywords	Number of references	Keywords	Number of references	Keywords	Number of references	Keywords	Number of references	Keywords	Number of references	Keywords	Number of references
Nursing specialties	46	Family relationships	173	Questionnaire method	731	Family psychology	1046	Cancer Nursing	1068	Family psychology	869
Nursing Research	20	Family psychology	166	Pediatric Nursing	728	Cancer Nursing	964	Pediatric Nursing	913	Pediatric Nursing	740
At-home care	19	Pediatric Nursing	135	Family psychology	724	Pediatric Nursing	936	Family psychology	794	Cancer Nursing	702
Social roles	14	Cancer Nursing	132	Cancer Nursing	657	Questionnaire method	704	Semi-constructive interview	690	Registered Nurse	691
Family relationships	8	At-home care	125	Health care provider–family relationships	520	Semi-constructive interview	691	Registered Nurse	641	Home nursing	611

Table 2: Frequently Occurring Keywords in Japanese Family Nursing References.
Note 1: The keyword “family nursing” was excluded.

At the same time, however, in the modern era of an increasingly international society, a new view of the family has grown, influenced by family life in other countries.

Changes in Japan’s family structure include a marked increase in single-person and two-person households, and the average number of people in a family continues to decline. Furthermore, the number of single-parent households with children has been steadily increasing since 1995, and many of these families later remarry, forming stepfamilies. The decline in family members and weakening of family relationships can be regarded as challenges faced by the modern Japanese family. With regard to changes in family functions, families are becoming increasingly diverse in how they work and provide care for their children. More families are now balancing child-raising and caregiving for grandparents while both parents are working. In addition, men are increasingly spending more time on household chores. Therefore, in the practice of family nursing, it is essential to assess the family’s image without being constrained by traditional gender roles in Japan.

Family nursing can be considered a learning process combining both micro and macro perspectives, such as understanding the relationships among family members while recognizing the diverse values of each family member. We believe that case studies clarifying how the characteristics of a family group are understood and what kind of support is provided through interactions with family members serve as invaluable resources for developing nursing care tailored to the unique characteristics of Japanese families. Among the key issues outlined in JARFN’s grand design are “developing a concept of Japanese family nursing” and “visualizing and promoting family nursing practices” [15]. We believe that case studies are an effective research method for universalizing nursing care tailored to Japan’s evolving and diverse families. It is desirable to develop case studies to find nursing care that aligns with the realities of the family and dynamics of contemporary society. We believe that case studies will help build the future of family nursing in Japan.

Conclusion

When I reflect on the patients and their families I have worked with, each family has its own unique characteristics, and no two are

exactly the same. However, similar problems can often follow a similar course. That is why nurses provide care based on their experience. Case studies, which emphasize the significance of engaging with individual cases, serve as valuable practical knowledge derived from the field and have benefitted many nurses. We would like to continue to share case studies from a variety of settings to help develop family nursing.

Conflict of Interest

The author declare no conflict of interest regarding the publication of the article.

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