



THEORETICAL ARTICLE/ESSAY

Critical analysis of Imogene King's theory of goal attainment

Análisis crítico de la teoría de la consecución de objetivos de Imogene King
Análise crítica da teoria da realização do objetivo de Imogene King

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Abstract

Background: Imogene King's theory of goal attainment has proven to be useful for nursing development, however, its use is limited, which highlights the need to critically analyze its contribution to the discipline.

Objective: To critically analyze Imogene King's goal attainment theory, as proposed methodologically by Chinn and Kramer.

Main topics under analysis: An analysis was carried out according to the criteria for theoretical reflection proposed by Chinn and Kramer, which consists of two phases: 1) description of the theory, considering the purpose, concepts and definitions, relationships, structure, and assumptions; and 2) critical reflection, including clarity, simplicity, generality, accessibility, and importance.

Conclusion: The theory is clear, simple, generalizable, accessible, and important for professional practice. However, it has limitations in its scope with patients who are unable to interact, and it is not parsimonious due to the incorporation of many concepts. More empirical evidence is required to demonstrate its use in practice.

Keywords: nursing theory; nursing research; models, nursing; nursing

Resumen

Marco contextual: La teoría del logro de objetivos de Imogene King ha demostrado ser útil para el desarrollo de la enfermería. No obstante, su uso es limitado, lo que releva la necesidad de analizar críticamente su aporte a la disciplina.

Objetivo: Analizar críticamente la teoría del logro de objetivos de Imogene King, según la propuesta metodológica de Chinn y Kramer.

Principales temas en análisis: Se realizó un análisis de acuerdo con los criterios de reflexión teórica propuestos por Chinn y Kramer, que consta de dos fases: 1) descripción de la teoría, considerando el propósito, conceptos y definiciones, relaciones, estructura y supuestos; y 2) reflexión crítica, que incluye claridad, sencillez, generalidad, accesibilidad e importancia.

Conclusión: La teoría es clara, sencilla, generalizable, accesible y con importancia para el ejercicio profesional. Sin embargo, presenta limitaciones en su alcance con pacientes que no pueden interactuar, además, no es parsimoniosa debido a la incorporación de muchos conceptos. Se requiere mayor evidencia empírica que demuestre su uso en la práctica.

Palabras clave: teoría de enfermería; investigación en enfermería; modelos de enfermería; enfermería

Resumo

Enquadramento: A teoria de realização de objetivos de Imogene King provou ser útil para o desenvolvimento da enfermagem. No entanto, a sua utilização é limitada, o que realça a necessidade de analisar criticamente o seu contributo para a disciplina.

Objetivo: Analisar criticamente a teoria da realização de objetivos de Imogene King, de acordo com a proposta metodológica de Chinn e Kramer.

Principais tópicos em análise: Foi efetuada uma análise de acordo com os critérios de reflexão teórica propostos por Chinn e Kramer, que consiste em duas fases: 1) descrição da teoria, considerando o objetivo, conceitos e definições, relações, estrutura e pressupostos; e 2) reflexão crítica, incluindo clareza, simplicidade, generalidade, acessibilidade e relevância.

Conclusão: A teoria é clara, simples, generalizável, acessível e relevante para a prática profissional. No entanto, tem limitações no seu âmbito de aplicação a doentes incapazes de interagir, e não é parcimoniosa devido à incorporação de muitos conceitos. São necessárias mais provas empíricas para demonstrar a sua utilização na prática.

Palavras-chave: teoria de enfermagem; pesquisa em enfermagem; modelos de enfermagem; enfermagem



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Introduction

Mid-range theories potentially contribute to clinical work but are not commonly utilized (Carvajal & Sánchez, 2018). Some authors argue that this is due to nursing's limited knowledge about them (Adib-Hajbaghery & Tahmouresi, 2018), which hinders their implementation into healthcare work and presents a challenge for training schools that must allocate more time to incorporate them (McQueen et al., 2017).

Evidence indicates that theoretical frameworks are beneficial for clinical practice, education, administration, and research, but healthcare institutions have struggled to integrate them effectively (Younas & Quennell, 2019). Also, the limited use of theoretical frameworks in nursing education and research may worsen this situation (Alves et al., 2021).

Imogene King (1981) proposes the middle-range theory of goal attainment, stating that the nurse-patient interaction should be stimulated through three interacting systems: personal, interpersonal, and social, aiming to improve health and incorporate autonomous behaviors. For this purpose, the systems behave dynamically as interdependent and interrelated variables with the aim of achieving the proposed goals.

This theory has been used by nurses in research, administration, and education, guiding clinical practice in a given population under specific conditions and situations (Meleis, 2012), with simple and clear concepts that enhance the flow of transitions through action, reaction, and interaction, whereby nurse and patient share information and, through purposeful communication, identify goals, problems, or concerns (Carroll, 2020). However, many nurses are not familiar with this theory (Adib-Hajbaghery & Tahmouresi, 2018).

Moreover, Imogene King's theory is recognised for its comprehensive approach to the nursing process, enhancing nursing practice and contributing to the advancement of knowledge within the field (Alligood, 2018). It is crucial to understand the topic, so analyzing the theoretical proposals in the field is necessary. This will help as a facilitator for their practical use and implementation in practice. Emphasizing the significance of nursing theories for nursing practice advancement, this article aims to critically analyze Imogene King's Theory of Goal Attainment based on Chinn and Kramer's methodological framework (2018), acknowledging its limitations.

Development

A reflective study was carried out within a nursing sciences PhD program, using Chinn and Kramer's (2018) critical analysis method in two parts: 1) description of the theory, considering purpose, concepts and definitions, relationships, structure and assumptions; and 2) critical

reflection, which considers clarity, simplicity, generality, accessibility, and importance.

For critical analysis, a literature review (Noble and Smith, 2018) was carried out by consulting the Wos, Pubmed and CINAHL databases, using the search formula: ("Imogene King Theory") OR ("Imogene King's Theory"). Inclusion criteria were: studies conducted between 2012-2022, in English, Spanish and Portuguese, and original full-text articles. From the results obtained, letters to the editor, editorials, theses, and conference proceedings were excluded, and a total of nine articles were finally selected for analysis.

First phase: Description of the theory

Regarding the first phase of the analysis, namely "Theoretical or conceptual description of the model," the theory's objective is to provide care by achieving goals or objectives, which are attained through transactions to reach an agreement between the nurse and the patient (King, 1981, 2007).

Fitzpatrick and Whall (2005) state that nursing theories use interconnected concepts to describe, explain, predict or prescribe phenomena in clinical practice. The Theory of Goal Attainment facilitates the establishment of scientific knowledge by applying a theoretical construct comprising three interconnected systems, as outlined below:

Firstly, the personal system, where the person is interacting with other systems. It uses ideas, attitudes, and values that influence self-care. In this system, there are six concepts that facilitate understanding: perception, self, growth and development, body image, space and time.

Secondly, the interpersonal system is a fundamental dimension as it delineates the relationships between dyads (two individuals), triads (three individuals) and small groups such as families (four individuals). The central concepts expounded upon in this study are interaction (acts between two or more people), communication, transaction, role and stress (Fronczek & Messmer, 2022).

Thirdly, the social system, where the nature of social groups defines the type of relationship formed and modified as individuals transition from childhood to adulthood. It is a structured system that establishes boundaries, social roles, behaviors, and practices to comply with norms. This system employs organization, power, authority, status, and decision-making concepts (King, 2007).

The initial definition of concepts is limited due to the lack of nursing terminology, a theoretical phenomenon, and inadequate conceptual development (Fronczek & Messmer, 2022). The preferred concepts of the theory are reaction, communication, interaction, transaction, and accomplishment of goals.

The concepts defined by McEwen and Wills (2021) are focused on the interpersonal system and have evolved over the years (King, 1981, 2007). Table 1 presents the nursing metaparadigm, and Table 2 defines the concepts employed in Imogene King's theory.

Table 1

Nursing metaparadigm according to Imogene King

Metaparadigm	Definition
Nursing	An observable behavior found in the health systems of society.
Health	A dynamic experience of continuous adjustment to internal and external stressors, through the optimal use of resources to achieve maximum potential for daily living.
Individuals	Spiritual, unique and holistic beings with intrinsic value, with the capacity to think and make rational decisions in most situations, and with the ability to record their history and preserve their culture. Each individual differs in their needs, desires, and goals.
Environment	Where human interactions are generated; their understanding is essential for nursing.

Table 2

Definition of concepts used in Imogene King's Theory of Goal Attainment

Concept	Definition
Perception	It involves organizing, interpreting, and transforming information so that the transaction is generated.
Communication	It is the process by which information is given from one person to another, and involves intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships and exchanges.
Interaction	Understood as the process of perceiving and communicating through verbal and nonverbal behaviors with the aim of achieving objectives.
Transaction	A process of interactions in which humans communicate with the environment to achieve goals and objectives.
Stress	A dynamic state in which the individual interacts with the environment for growth, development, and performance. The exchange of information is essential to regulate and control stressors.

King suggests that relationships are formed via dynamic systems which interact and contribute towards achieving goals. The personal system involves the care recipient or person who interacts with other systems, applying their ideas, attitudes, and values to influence their self-care. In the interpersonal system, a transaction occurs during the nurse-patient interaction (dyads) or when three (triads) or four individuals mutually agree on the goals to be accomplished. Furthermore, the social system is created through the comprehension of concepts, organization of intervention behaviors, and decision-making within societies or organizations (Fronczek & Messmer, 2022). The structure of the theory is presented in open dynamic conceptual systems, with communication being a fundamental tool for influencing patient behavior in a transactional process, which allows the establishment of objectives (Fronczek & Messmer, 2022).

Finally, the theoretical assumptions have been published in several books where they are interrelated and presented as a reference framework (Fronczek, 2022). The concepts can be found in systems that are organized in a clear and coherent manner from the most basic to the most extensive (Fitzpatrick & Whall, 2005). Nurses use interactions with individuals by establishing relationships with their surrounding environment to enhance well-being, using the metaparadigm: nursing, environment, person, and health (Peterson & Bredow, 2013).

Second phase: Critical reflection

For the second phase of the analysis, Chinn and Kramer (2018) present a framework for critical reflection on theories that involves addressing five key questions. These questions are: 1. How clear is the theory?; 2. How simple is the theory?; 3. How general is the theory?; 4. How accessible is the theory?; 5. How important is the theory? The terminology employed in King's theory is clear, allowing for the comprehension of the presented ideas, without the addition of neologisms or terms that induce inaccurate or confusing meanings. Nurses can easily understand the theory, given its precise definitions of concepts presented in a straightforward manner (Fronczek & Messmer, 2022). The diagram provides clarity and structural consistency for understanding and incorporating the process of human interaction into clinical practice. The terms used integrate the concepts of interaction, communication, transaction and goal attainment, and the structure facilitates the fulfillment of the purpose with easily identifiable links (Kim et al., 2021). Simplicity is supported by conceptual definitions that arise from research, expressed in a clear form for easy comprehension (Fronczek & Messmer, 2022). Interactions that demonstrate a binding process with verbal or non-verbal communication establish connections and evidence a process within a structure. Authors postulate that the theory is not parsimonious due to the incorporation of

many concepts, which originates multiple assumptions that are defined within a personal, interpersonal, and social system (McEwen & Wills, 2021).

Regarding generality, the theory is generally applicable to clinical and research settings for all age groups due to its well-defined structural elements and specific objectives. However, limitations arise when patients are unable to interact, necessitating the involvement of the family to create an action plan for problem-solving and goal attainment (Siti et al., 2018).

Concerning the theory's accessibility in the process of nurse-patient interaction for goal attainment, the theory arises from empirical data in different areas of practice with clear definitions that facilitate understanding and can be used in different types of care needs of individuals and groups, especially adults (Fronczek & Messmer, 2022). The theory's importance lies in guiding research and practice in education and care management through an understanding of the concepts and system of interactions. Some hospitals have already incorporated it. Nevertheless, the empirical evidence supporting the concepts is limited (Fitzpatrick & Whall, 2005).

Research has primarily been conducted in open care contexts and, to a lesser extent, in closed care contexts across different age groups, as observed by Frey et al. (2002). The implementation of theory into practice has taken place in various countries, including the United States, Canada, Australia, Brazil, China, Japan, India, Portugal, Sweden, Slovenia, and African countries (Fronczek & Messmer, 2022).

Conclusion

This study answers the proposed objective through critical analysis of Imogene King's Theory of Goal Attainment. The study facilitates its use and incorporation into professional practice.

The theory describes, explains, and predicts a care phenomenon, with clear and simple concepts. The patient assumes an active role in their self-care and establishes attainable goals. In this context, the nurse takes on the role of a companion in a relationship that can be replicated in various healthcare situations, such as in promotion, treatment, and rehabilitation activities. The nursing work is facilitated by structured elements for communication, interaction, transaction, and goal attainment.

As this theory encompasses various concepts and generates multiple assumptions, it can be applied in clinical practice and research. This renders the approach transferable, applicable to various individual and group needs both in hospital and community care settings across the globe. The challenge is to employ the most fitting concepts that can be integrated into health care practices, whilst urging educational institutions to incorporate these in their pedagogical materials to enhance understanding.

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