


# An analysis of Norwegian public health nursing curricula: Where is the nursing literature?

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## Abstract

**Background:** Norwegian public health nurses prevent diseases and promote health in children and young people aged 0–20 and their families. Public health nursing programs prepare students for their practical role and provide relevant theoretical knowledge.

**Objectives:** To gain knowledge of the literature in the Norwegian public health nursing curricula, and to examine further the nursing base in these curricula.

**Design:** An explorative and descriptive design was chosen.

**Sample:** Reading lists based on syllabus documents from the 10 higher educational institutions in Norway offering programs in public health nursing.

**Measurements:** A summative content analysis and a categorization of content from reading lists were performed.

**Results:** Numerical information on the content and categorization of reading lists shows that social science and humanities literature dominates, followed by psychology and medicine. Nursing texts, theories and philosophy comprise only a minor part of the curricula.

**Conclusion:** The paper provides valuable data on the theoretical focus in Norwegian public health nursing and raises important questions about the paucity of nursing texts in the curriculum. The imbalance in reading lists in Norway should be studied further and similar studies conducted in other countries to encourage reflection on the theoretical content of public health nursing education globally.

## KEYWORDS

Norway, nursing focus, public health nursing education, syllabus documents

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 | Background

Norwegian public health nurses (PHNs) play a key role in disease prevention and health promotion through their work in child health clinics

(0–5 years), school health services (6–20 years) and adolescent health clinics (13–20 years) (Norwegian Directorate of Health, 2021). They care for the individual child and family, as well as working at group and population level. Their ideology is based on service user involvement and empowerment (Glavin et al., 2014; Norwegian Directorate of Health, 2021). PHNs focus on health promotion and prevention

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through home visits, consultations, individual and group health dialogues, screening, etc. (Norwegian Directorate of Health, 2021). Today, more than 90% of families attend local child health clinics (Statistics Norway, 2020). PHNs also offer school health services in all primary and secondary schools (Norwegian Directorate of Health, 2021). PHNs abide by the ethical guidelines of the Norwegian Nurses Organization (2021).

### 1.1.1 | Historical development of public health nursing

Public health nursing has throughout history adapted to meet current public health needs (Schjøtz, 2003). The historical development of public health nursing services has followed the same pattern in all Nordic countries and PHNs now focus more on psychosocial issues. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has influenced PHNs' role and function, and many nurses are currently redeployed from traditional health promotion services to provide infectious disease control and immunizations for other population groups (Statistics Norway, 2021). The broad mandate of PHNs indicates the need for a comprehensive knowledge base. Public health nursing is grounded in both public health and nursing ideologies. The public health model is a general model that focuses on the health of populations and on the relationship between host, agent, and environment (Glavin et al., 2014). Nursing is an approach that focuses on relationships, on care and on strengthening each individual's resources (Clancy, 2010; Kirkevold, 1998). In 2019, Norwegian PHNs changed their over 100-year-old title of *helsesøster* (lit. health sister) to the gender-neutral title of *helsesykepleier* (lit. health nurse) (Ministry of Health & Care Services, 2018). The word "nurse" is now explicit in the new title. Even though the title has changed, the PHNs' role has not. However, PHNs must constantly adapt their services to meet the current needs of their target population (Dahl, 2018; Schjøtz, 2003).

### 1.1.2 | Development of nursing education

The first school of nursing in Norway was inspired by Nightingale's nursing philosophy (Austgard, 2018; Glavin et al., 2014). However, the further development of nursing education in Norway was influenced by the American nursing model. This process led to discussions on what the evidence base for nursing should be. Martinsen (2006) criticized professional development based on a medical discourse and emphasized the need to focus on nursing values and on care and vulnerability (Schjøtz, 2003). Throughout history, nursing scholars have recognized nursing as a practical discipline but have also acknowledged the need for theories to guide nursing research and professional practice (Alligood, 2013). The limitations of theories from other disciplines to describe, explain or predict nursing practice were recognized. Developing nursing knowledge was important to enable nursing to be acknowledged as a profession. The dilemma for nurses was to protect traditional nursing values and at the same time gain professional status (Clancy, 2010).

The need for a scientific nursing base was promoted by nursing scholars (Alligood, 2013; Kirkevold, 1998). In the late 20th century, nursing became recognized as an academic discipline and nursing scholars were involved in developing nursing theories and philosophies and higher educational pathways for nurses. Nursing theories and nursing philosophies are defined differently. Nursing philosophies create an understanding of nursing values and nursing phenomena through a questioning attitude, whereas nursing theories seek to answer specific questions related to practice. Theories can be practical and related to clinical work, nurse-patient relationships or context and aim to promote an understanding of what nursing is or should be (Kim, 2010; Kirkevold, 1998; Norwegian Directorate of Health, 2021). Nursing theories and philosophies can help students to develop analytical skills and critical thinking and contribute to professional autonomy (Alligood, 2013, p. 13). Philosophies have the highest level of abstraction; theories are often middle-range and apply philosophy to practice.

### 1.1.3 | Public health nursing education

The first public health nursing education in Norway was established in 1947 (Schjøtz, 2003). There are currently 10 higher educational institutions (HEIs) that offer public health nursing in Norway (Norwegian Nurses Organization, 2021). Admission requirements for public health nursing programs are a bachelor's degree in nursing (180 ECTS credits) and minimum of 1 year's experience as a registered nurse (Ministry of Education & Research, 2018). Public health nursing education qualifies nurses to provide municipal health promotion and prevention nursing services for their target population (children and young people 0–20 years and their families). Completion of the program qualifies the nurse for a position as a PHN. Students can also continue to a master's degree in public health nursing (120 ECTS credits). Four of the 10 HEIs in Norway offer master's degree programs that qualify for admission to a PhD program (Norwegian Nurses, Organization, 2021). The national guidelines for public health nursing education (Ministry of Education & Research, 2005) have recently been updated (Government of Norway, 2021), and the changes will be implemented in 2023. The new regulations state that postgraduate education to qualify as a PHN will be 90 ECTS credits, while a master's degree in public health nursing will be 120 credits as before. Requirements for clinical practice are a minimum of 10 weeks (15 ECTS). These remain the same in the new guidelines (Government of Norway, 2021; Ministry of Education & Research, 2005). Research has indicated a need to clarify the theoretical underpinnings of the discipline, since the knowledge base of PHNs is unclear (Clancy, 2010; Swearingen, 2009). When nursing leans too heavily on other disciplines, its unique contribution to public health becomes fuzzy (Kulbok & Erwin, 2012). Swearingen (2009) writes that nursing philosophy and nursing theory could guide PHN practice, and Kulbok and Erwin (2012) suggest that nursing theories and philosophies are underutilized in public health nursing. Constant changes in the PHN role and function and a paucity of studies on public health nursing curricula calls for a closer look at how these nurses are prepared.

## 2 | OBJECTIVES

The main purpose of this paper is to explore and describe the central focus in the reading lists for all public health nursing programs in Norway. One aim is to gain knowledge of the literature that guides public health nursing education in Norway today and to explore further the focus on nursing in the reading lists. A further aim is to promote reflection on what constitutes *nursing* in public health nursing and encourage further international studies on the topic.

## 3 | METHODS

### 3.1 | Design

The design is explorative and descriptive with content analysis as the analytical tool. Content analysis is a systematic approach to analyzing documents for their content (Krippendorf, 2018) and can be both qualitative and quantitative (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). An inductive approach is deemed relevant when the purpose is explorative (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). We performed an inductive content analysis of reading lists from all 10 HEIs offering public health nursing in Norway (Table 1). The purpose was to provide an overview of the content of reading lists that prepare public health nursing students for their role as PHNs.

### 3.2 | Sample

We conducted a review of syllabus documents related to reading lists from the 10 HEIs that offer public health nursing education in Norway (Table 1).

### 3.3 | Data collection

Data were accessed from syllabus documents and reading lists from 10 HEIs (Table 1). We analyzed the mandatory reading lists; supplementary or optional reading lists were not included in the analysis. We accessed reading lists from the websites of the HEIs. The documents were retrieved in January and February, 2021. The reading lists of two of the HEIs were accessed by email from the program manager.

### 3.4 | Analytic strategy

The authors conducted a summative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Krippendorf, 2018). First, we identified and counted the number of pages in the reading lists from the 10 HEIs (Table 1). We then located the reading material through web searches on Oria (UiT, 2021). Oria is a search service that allows students and university employees access to the total resources of a library. We also conducted electronic searches for books in the National Library of Norway (2021) and manual searches for chapters in books that the authors had access to.

The number of pages in chapters, books, articles and other texts were counted and the content was sorted into six predefined categories. The rationale for the categories was drawn from the content of the national guidelines for public health nursing (Ministry of Education & Research, 2005) (Table 2). The main categories were social sciences and the humanities, medicine, psychology, nursing, law, and "other texts".

## 4 | RESULTS

After a rigorous process of analysis detailed in Tables 1–3, the authors gained an overview of the content of the reading lists for each institution (Figure 1).

Table 3 presents a detailed description of the summative content of the six categories of literature based on the 10 HEIs.

The results show that social sciences and humanities were the dominating category in each HEI, amounting to 45.9% of the total number of pages analyzed (Table 3, Figure 1). The psychology category amounted to 25.7% of the total number of pages, while the figure for medicine was 16.3%. The remaining categories were below 10% of the total content: nursing was 5.6%, law 4%, and other literature 2.4% of the total. Variations in content between the different institutions are detailed in Table 3. We found that nine of the 10 educational institutions had laws, regulations, and procedure manuals relevant to PHNs in their reading lists (Table 3). However, UiT The Arctic University of Norway had these texts as supplementary reading material.

### 4.1 | Nursing focus in the reading lists

The results show that the nursing focus in the reading lists from the 10 HEIs varied from 0.7% to 14.2% (Table 3). The nursing category comprised literature on PHNs' professional role and mandate, nursing theory and philosophy, and practical methods in public health nursing (Tables 2 and 3). We found that VID University had the highest number of pages of nursing literature (mostly practical methods in public health nursing) of all the HEIs ( $n = 767$ ) (14.2%) (Tables 2 and 3). The University of Stavanger (UiS) had the second largest proportion of nursing literature ( $n = 510$ ) (13.4%), consisting of a variety of practical methods in public health nursing, professional role and mandate, and nursing theory and philosophy (Tables 2 and 3). UiT The Arctic University of Norway had 319 pages of nursing literature (6.8%), which included professional role and mandate, nursing theory and philosophy, and practical methods in public health nursing (Tables 2 and 3). The Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), at its campuses in Trondheim and Aalesund, had 255 pages of nursing literature (6.5%). This included professional role and mandate, nursing theory and philosophy and practical methods in public health nursing. Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences had 319 pages of nursing theory (5%), focusing on practical methods in public health nursing and professional role and mandate. Western University of Norway in Bergen had 188 pages of nursing literature (4%), while Oslo Metropolitan University

**TABLE 1** Overview of the 10 Norwegian HEIs offering public health nursing

Institutions	Modules	ECTS
Western Norway University of Applied Sciences (HVL)	HEL 501 Theory of science, research methods and evidence-based practice	10
	HEL 502 Health promotion and prevention with children and adolescents	20
	HEL 503 Clinical studies	15
	HEL 504 Specialization and clinical governance	15
VID Specialized University: Oslo, Bergen	VUHEL5000 Understanding basic phenomena and framework for public health nursing	10
	VUPRO5000 Worldview, values and professional practice	5
	VUHEL5100 Public health nurse service delivery 1 (including clinical practice)	15
	VUHEL5200 Public health nurse service delivery 2 (including clinical practice)	15
	VUHEL5400 Theory of science, research methods and research ethics	15
Oslo Metropolitan University (Oslo Met)	HELPR1 Clinical studies	15
	HEL6920 Public health nursing among individuals and groups, including thesis	15
	HEL6210 The health of the family - children (0-5 years)	10
	HEL6320 The health of the family - school children and adolescents (6-20 years)	10
	HEL6050 Theory of science and research methods	10
The University of Stavanger (UiS)	MHV140 Philosophy of science and moral philosophy	10
	<sup>a</sup> MHE110 Basic understanding and framework	10
	MHE120 Child and adolescent health and development	20
	MHV142 Research methods 1	10
	MHE130 Working methods in public health nursing	10
	MHEP14 Public health nursing: clinical studies	10
	MHEFOR Professional development	5
UiT The Arctic University of Norway? (campuses in Tromsø, Harstad and Alta)	HEL 3157 Health promotion and prevention for children and young people in primary health care	10
	HEL 3160 Theory of science for the health sciences	10
	HEL 3158 Child and adolescent health and development	10
	HEL 3159 Professional practice in public health nursing (clinical practice)	20
	HEL 3121 Research methods and methodology	10
	HEL 3161 Research processes and research ethics	10
	HEL 3162 Professional development, quality and innovation	10
Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences (Elverum)	4HFOHE1 Public health nursing	15
	HEL 3001 Public health nursing with children 0–5 years and their families	15
	HEL 3002 Public health nursing with school students	15
	HEL 3003 The basis for evidence-based services in public health nursing	15

(Continues)

**TABLE 1** (Continued)

Institutions	Modules	ECTS
University of South-Eastern Norway (Porsgrunn)	986-E1 The individual, society and health	15
	986-E2 The health of children and adolescents	15
	<sup>a</sup> 986-E3 The public health nursing service and professional practices (clinical practice)	15
	986-E4 The public health nursing service and professional development	15
Molde University College	VHS731 Public health nursing, framework and basic understanding	7.5
	<sup>a</sup> VHS730 Theory of science and research methods	7.5
	VHS732 Child and adolescent health and development and working methods in public health nursing, parts 1 and 2	15
	<sup>a</sup> VHS733 Professional practice in public health nursing (clinical practice), parts 1 and 2	15
	<sup>a</sup> VHS734 Thesis	15
<sup>b</sup> The Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), campus Aalesund	SYA 6000 Public health work	15
	SYA 6001 Health, development and communication - children, adolescents and families	15
	MH 3005 Introduction to research methods	7.5
	<sup>a</sup> SYA 6010/SYA 6011 Public health nurse services or International public health nurse services	15
	<sup>a</sup> SYA 6003 Professional specialization - project plan	7.5
<sup>b</sup> The Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), campus Trondheim	SYT 6000 Public health work	15
	SYT 6001 Health, development and communication - children, adolescents and families	15
	MH 3000 Introduction to research methods	7.5
	<sup>a</sup> SYT 6010/SYT 6011 Public health nurse services or International public health nurse services	15
	<sup>a</sup> SYT 6003 Professional specialization - project plan	7.5

<sup>a</sup>Modules without reading lists or only supplementary or optional material.

<sup>b</sup>Reading lists accessed by email.

**TABLE 2** The main categories and descriptions of their content

Category	Description of content
Social sciences and the humanities	Sociological theory, salutogenesis, resource-based resilience, health literacy, self-efficacy, health education, individual and system-oriented theories focusing on health promotion and prevention, empowerment, communication, guidance and supervision, the philosophy of science, research methods.
Psychology	Developmental theories, various kinds of interventions and how interactions between children and family members affect children's development, etc.
Medicine	Epidemiology, vaccine literature, biomedical theory in contraception, pediatrics, psychomotor movement, visual acuity, ophthalmology, vaccination, infection control, weight and length, nutrition, breastfeeding, etc.
Nursing	PHNs' role in community services. School nurses' role in preventing and identifying mental health issues. History of Norwegian public health nursing. Perceptions of PHN consultations. Ethics, caring, power and vulnerability in PHN consultations. Home visits as a method. Manual book for PHNs' work in child health clinics and school health services. How PHNs can promote health and wellbeing among adolescents. How to deal with vulnerable school pupils. Guidelines to identify overweight and obesity. PHNs and parent groups, etc.
Law	Legal texts related to "the best interest of the child", professional behavior and confidentiality.
Other	Examples of content: midwifery and maternity care.

**TABLE 3** The summative content of the six categories of literature based on the 10 HEIs

Institution	Coursecodes	Psychology (n)	Medicine (n)	Social scienceandthe humanities (n)	Law (n)	Nursing (n)	Other (n)
Western Norway University of Applied Sciences (HVL) Bergen	HEL-501	41	10	265	0	61	0
	HEL-502	1307	1012	376	194	127	0
	HEL-503	10	0	297	9	0	0
	HEL-504	0	0	508	1V	0	393
<b>Total</b>	<b>4610</b>	<b>1358</b> = 29.7%	<b>1022</b> = 22.2%	<b>1446</b> = 31.7%	<b>203+1V</b> = 4.4%	<b>188</b> = 4%	<b>393</b> = 8.5%
VID Specialized University(VID) Oslo	VUHEL5000	0	12	408	0	361	0
	VUPRO5000	0	1	52	0	91	309
	VUHEL5100-1	170	604	545	47+1V	276	0
	VUHEL5200	363	712	415	384	39	323
	VUHEL5400	0	79	176	0	0	54
<b>Total</b>	<b>5420</b>	<b>533</b> = 9.8%	<b>1408</b> = 26%	<b>1595</b> = 29.4%	<b>431+1V</b> = 8%	<b>767</b> = 14.2%	<b>686</b> = 12.7%
The University of Stavanger (UiS)	MH110	0	23	400	202+1V	246	0
	MHE120	1201	474	350	5+1V	49	0
	MHE130	246+1V	109	264	27+1V	107	0
	MHEP14	0	0	0	0	108	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>3811</b>	<b>1447+1V</b> = 38%	<b>606</b> = 15.9%	<b>1014</b> = 26.6%	<b>234+3V</b> = 6.1%	<b>510</b> = 13.4%	<b>0</b> = 0%
UiT The Arctic University of Norway	HEL-3157	31	0	395	56	111	6
	HEL-3160	0	0	560	0	0	0
	HEL-3158	465	360	271	0	51	19
	HEL-3159	7	49	229	7	157	0
	HEL-3121	0	0	958	0	0	0
	HEL-3161	0	0	434	0	0	0
	HEL-3162	0	0	511	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>4677</b>	<b>503</b> = 10.8%	<b>409</b> = 8.75%	<b>3358</b> = 71.8%	<b>63</b> = 1.3%	<b>319</b> = 6.8%	<b>25</b> = 0.5%
Inland University (Elverum)	4HFOHE1	9	0	1455	265	213	0
	HEL-3001	750	332+8V	594	2V	30	0
	HEL-3002	1007	40+3V	1507	85+3V	76	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>6363</b>	<b>1766</b> = 27.8%	<b>372+11V</b> = 5.8%	<b>3556</b> = 55.9%	<b>350+5V</b> = 5.5%	<b>319</b> = 5%	<b>0</b> = 0%
University of South-Eastern Norway (Porsgrunn)	986-E1	9	22	2294+1V	194	83	0
	986-E2	1308	1797	762	0	10	33
	986-E4	0	14	845	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>7371</b>	<b>1317</b> = 17.9%	<b>1833</b> = 24.9%	<b>3901+1V</b> = 52.9%	<b>194</b> = 2.6%	<b>93</b> = 1.3%	<b>33</b> = 0.4%
Molde University College	VHS731	0	0	299	71+1V	5	0
	VHS732	1595	697+1V	1107	2V	20	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>3794</b>	<b>1595</b> = 42%	<b>697+1V</b> = 18.4%	<b>1406</b> = 37%	<b>71+3V</b> = 1.9%	<b>25</b> = 0.7%	<b>0</b> = 0%
The Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) campus Aalesund	SYA-6000	0	460+3V	903	194	181	43
	SYA-6001	742	486	340	1V	74	31
	MH 3005	0	7	464+4 checklist	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>3925</b>	<b>742</b> = 18.9%	<b>953+3V</b> = 24.3%	<b>1707</b> = 43.5%	<b>194+1V</b> = 4.9%	<b>255</b> = 6.5%	<b>74</b> = 1.9%

(Continues)

TABLE 3 (Continued)

Institution	Course codes	Psychology (n)	Medicine (n)	Social science and the humanities (n)	Law (n)	Nursing (n)	Other (n)
The Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) campus Trondheim	SYT-6000	0	460+3V	903	194	181	43
	SYT-6001	742	486	340	1V	74	31
	MH 3000	0	7	464+4 checklist	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>3925</b>	<b>742</b> = 18.9%	<b>953+3V</b> = 24.3%	<b>1707</b> = 43.5%	<b>194+1V</b> = 4.9%	<b>255</b> = 6.5%	<b>74</b> = 1.9%
Oslo Metropolitan University (Oslo Met)	HELPR1	215	29+1V	504	0	68	0
	HEL-6920	0	208	1282	194	115+1V	0
	HEL-6210	1418	145	696	0	65	0
	HEL-6320	2143	134+1V	267	1V	50	0
	HEL-6050	0	0	2205	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>9738</b>	<b>3776</b> = 38.8%	<b>516+2v</b> = 5.3%	<b>4954</b> = 50.9%	<b>194+1v</b> = 2%	<b>298</b> = 3%	<b>0</b> = 0%
Total pages (n)	N: 53634 = 100%	13779+1v = 25.7%	8769+20v = 16.3%	24644+9V = 45.9%	2128+14v = 4%	3029+1v = 5.6%	1285 = 2.4%

V = National guidelines/checklists on critical appraisal skills in reading research literature, n = pages

had 298 pages (3%), including literature on PHNs' professional role and mandate, nursing theory and practical methods. The University of South-Eastern Norway had 93 pages (1.3%). These aforementioned institutions had primarily practical methods in public health nursing on their reading lists (Table 3). Molde University College had the smallest amount of PHN literature, at 25 pages (0.7%). However, it should be noted that this program started in 2020 and had only two reading lists posted on its website during the data collection period (Table 3).

## 5 | DISCUSSION

The purpose of the paper is to explore and describe the central focus in the reading lists of all Norwegian HEIs offering public health nursing education and to further examine the nursing focus. We found that the dominating category in each HEI was social sciences and the humanities, followed by psychology and then medicine (Figure 1; Table 3). It seems reasonable that the category of social sciences and the humanities dominates as it contains the bulk of literature on health promotion and prevention, whereas the categories of psychology and medicine contain important texts on child development and biomedical knowledge. However, an imbalance in focus was evident in the reading lists. There was a paucity of nursing literature in all 10 curricula, varying between 0.7% and 14.2% of the literature on the curriculum (Table 3). The limited nursing literature consisted primarily of practical methods in public health nursing, with less focus on the PHN's professional role and mandate, nursing theory and nursing philosophy. It is therefore pertinent to question the reason for this imbalance and what it may indicate. Reading lists should help students towards a better understanding of their practice as PHNs and mirror how PHNs contribute to public health. Below, we discuss the results related to PHNs' profes-

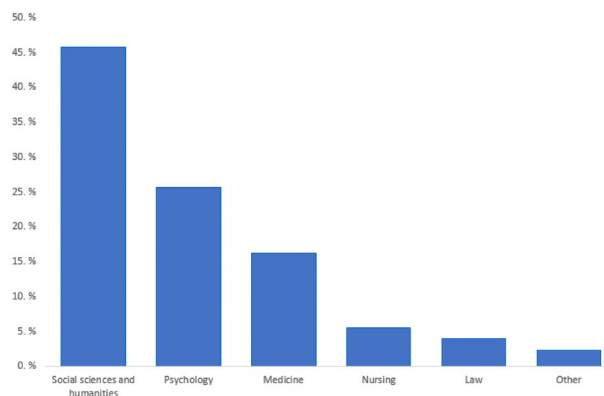


FIGURE 1 Overview of the content of the reading lists

sional role and mandate, nursing theory and philosophy, and practical methods in public health nursing.

### 5.1 | Professional role and mandate

Texts that inform students on public health nursing history and tradition can create an understanding of fundamental values and the development of public health nursing as an independent profession (Glavin et al., 2014). The results may indicate that public health nursing education leans too heavily on other knowledge bases, which can result in a lack of focus specific to the role and mandate of PHNs. Norwegian PHNs have a specialized focus on health promotion and prevention for their target group (0–20 years) (Norwegian Directorate of Health, 2021). When caring for children and communicating with parents, PHNs use psychological developmental theories and



medicine incorporated in their “hands-on work” at child health clinics. In school health services, PHNs conduct individual and group health dialogues based on health education and empowerment, following the national guidelines (2021). The topics covered include health and lifestyle, mental health, nutrition and eating disorders, sexual health and identity, alcohol and drugs, and use of social media (Laholt et al., 2018, 2020). Prevention of diseases is grounded in medical knowledge and the relationship between host, agent and environment. The public health model is an important theoretical perspective guiding public health nursing practice (Clancy et al., 2013; Elo & Calltorp, 2002), as is the nursing perspective. Public health is concerned with the health of populations and is based on expert knowledge applied to cases. Theories on health, public health and society dominate PHNs’ work at the relational and population levels. Nursing ideologies are concerned with contextual knowledge, aspects of care and supportive relationships. Public health nursing is a nursing specialty that combines nursing and public health principles (Clark et al., 2016; Quad Council of Public Health Nursing Organizations, 2011). Public health nursing in Norway has been described as invisible as these nurses do not provide curative care (Clancy et al., 2013). A lack of nursing literature that describes PHNs’ role and mandate reinforces this tendency.

## 5.2 | Nursing philosophy

Our results reveal very little focus on nursing theory and philosophy in the reading lists of the 10 HEIs. However, some HEIs had included nursing philosophy based on ethical challenges, caring, power and the meaning of relationships (Clancy, 2010, 2015; Martinsen, 2005). Even though responsibility, ethics and equity are important ideologies in public health nursing, public health texts are not written in a language that emphasizes life- philosophical and relational aspects of public health nursing. Martinsen (2006) emphasizes the need for an approach that caters for both evidence-based thinking and reflective texts on life-philosophical issues. Care has relational, moral and practical dimensions (Martinsen, 2006). The lack of nursing texts in the curricula for PHN students can result in less focus on ethical and existential life phenomena such as trust, empathy, hope and respect in a public health nursing context. A philosophical approach is not necessarily a theoretical approach that is far removed from practical public health nursing. It is a questioning approach that shows the inseparability of moral, relational and practical dimensions of nursing care (Bruce et al., 2014). Philosophical texts can benefit students, educators and professionals by promoting reflection, generating new questions and enabling a better understanding of their role and function. According to Bruce et al. (2014), philosophy is a crucial aspect of nursing as it is related to our being in the-world. Crowe and O’Malley (2006) described the importance of integrating different theoretical and philosophical perspectives to improve nursing practice.

Integrating philosophical and theoretical perspectives can promote reflection and greater awareness of how personal preferences and values can influence practice, and aid in verbalizing those reflections. Public health nursing is an independent profession with diffuse boundaries (Clancy, 2010). Critical thinking on values and ethics in public health is

also important. According to Kim (2010), health in itself, is not a nursing domain; for health to be a nursing domain the patient must be involved. An understanding of the nursing base is important. Martinsen (2006) states that a theory can enrich practice when it is analogous to it and encourages reflection in a language that expresses what is involved in encounters between nurses and patients.

## 5.3 | Practical methods in public health nursing

We found that the largest volume of nursing literature in the 10 HEIs dealt with practical methods in public health nursing. The findings illustrate that the length of the clinical practice modules varies between 15 and 20 ECTS in the Norwegian HEIs. Some of the HEIs did not have reading lists related to their practice modules (Table 1). Nevertheless, a practical knowledge base is necessary when caring for the individual child, adolescent and family, and when performing health promotion and prevention work at the individual and group level. Home visits and maximizing parents’ potential through health visiting services, prenatal parenting courses are important when caring for families (Whittaker, 2012). Practical knowledge is necessary when PHNs communicate with adolescents and prescribe and administer contraceptives to adolescent girls and boys. It is also necessary when organizing and administering immunizations, as well as when collaborating with parents, teachers and other health professionals (Laholt, 2020; Norwegian Institute of Public Health, 2019).

## 5.4 | Consequences

There is a huge diversity of practice roles and curricula for PHNs around the world and current practice does not prepare nurses to meet the needs of individuals and populations (Malone et al., 2016). Health promotion and prevention with children, young people and families remain the Norwegian PHNs’ core function, with an increased focus on mental health and responsibility for coordinating services for children and families with special needs. Health promotion seems to be an important focus area in the Norwegian curricula. An emphasis on interdisciplinary modules that are not specific to public health nursing can limit the nursing-specific focus in the curricula and increase the dearth of nursing literature. The authors argue that an integration of nursing with health promotion and prevention ideologies is important in PHN education. According to Hoeck and Delmar (2018), knowledge development in nursing is best served when it is based on a caring ethical practice that integrates theory, philosophy, and practice. Philosophy is not merely understood as relevant but also as vital to our discipline and professional practice (Bruce et al., 2014).

## 5.5 | Recommendations for future research

The authors hope that the article can encourage reflection and further national and international studies on the knowledge base of various public health nursing models.



## 5.6 | Implications for public health nursing

The PHNs' broad mandate indicates the need for a comprehensive knowledge base. However, our study has shown that nursing texts, theories and philosophy comprise only a minor part of the curricula in Norwegian public health nursing education. Public health nursing is grounded in nursing and public health ideologies. It can be argued that the nursing literature in the bachelor program is a sufficient base for PHNs. The PHN guidelines (Government of Norway, 2021) state that it is necessary to further develop the nursing role. The authors believe that the inclusion and use of nursing literature in the public health nursing program can give the students a deeper understanding of their advanced nursing role. Research has indicated that there is a need to clarify the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of the discipline, since the knowledge base of PHNs is unclear (Clancy, 2010; Swearingen, 2009). The results of the study can encourage discussions on PHNs' knowledge base and on how the lack of nursing texts in public health nursing programs affects students' education and the development of public health nursing knowledge and practice. The authors argue that the article has international relevance as it can provide a methodological template for similar studies in other countries and contexts. Studying the content of reading lists can raise awareness of the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of public health nursing and inspire educators to examine if their reading lists reflect the desired philosophical and theoretical foundations of their course. An important topic for discussion is, if it is acceptable not to include nursing literature that can further advance the nurses understanding of their professional public health nursing role.

## 6 | LIMITATIONS

Content analysis reveals the visible content of the text (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) and provides valuable insight into public health nursing students' theoretical knowledge base. The method was considered relevant to describe the manifest content of reading lists from the 10 HEIs. As reading lists from all Norwegian HEIs offering public health nursing were analyzed, issues of sampling bias were avoided. The study has limitations as it is descriptive in nature and does not provide explanations for the presented findings. However, the discussion reveals the authors' interpretations of the findings. The authors are aware that some of the literature could have been placed in a different category than we decided. Other researchers might have decided to categorize the literature differently; however, our focus was on the content of the nursing literature in the reading lists. This study reports the findings from a content analysis of reading lists from Norwegian HEIs. The relevance to an international audience can be questioned. However, the findings can stimulate discussions on the knowledge base for PHNs globally and can promote similar research in other contexts. The inductive analysis was conducted with a team of four researchers and the categorization was discussed by all team members. Content analysis is a descriptive process that reveals details of content (Elo & Kyngäs,

2008; Krippendorff, 2018). It does not provide information on usage or on the introduction of supplementary texts by teachers or students. The findings do, however, indicate that certain texts are considered more relevant. This may suggest discursive strategies that emphasize the importance of certain topics, rendering other topics less relevant (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2006). It was a limitation that all four members of the project group were PHNs, but it was a strength that we had a variety of experience as teachers on the public health nursing program and the bachelor's degree program in nursing. We could have missed some important issues when researching a familiar area; however, our team's bimonthly discussions nuanced these issues. We included theories of public health, empowerment and communication in the social science category because we considered these as overall perspectives based on social sciences, and not grounded in nursing theories. We considered communication, supervision, guidance and empowerment as important supporting theories and methods for public health nursing, but the result of our discussions was that these are not grounded in nursing science. Other researchers with different backgrounds and experiences might have analyzed this literature differently.


## 7 | CONCLUSION

PHNs' specialized role and mandate reflects the need for a comprehensive knowledge base. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has shown that these nurses can be redeployed from traditional health promotion services to providing services for other population groups. This article provides a clearer picture of Norwegian public health nursing education and illustrates how the curricular texts lean heavily on other disciplines. The lack of reading material on nursing in the curricula can blur the nursing base of PHNs and their specialized nursing role and function in public health. If nursing care is omitted from PHNs' education, it can also result in a lack of focus on core nursing values and phenomena such as vulnerability, dependency, and inherent dignity. It is important to examine curricular content to create awareness of the theoretical and philosophical knowledge base that prepares students for their role as PHNs. This is especially important at a time when much PHN education in Norway can consist of learning modules and reading lists that are shared with students from other disciplines. A tendency towards interdisciplinary education may have resulted in a fragmentation of the nursing knowledge base as well as a belief that general nursing education is sufficient. This study may lead to an increased focus on and discussions on the nursing focus in public health nursing education and on different public health models globally.

### DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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