

# Measuring Professional Quality of Life in Nurses: A Realist Review

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Oncology nurses are at risk for compassion fatigue, which is often assessed using the Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL). Nursing researchers and leaders use the ProQOL to determine risk for compassion fatigue or effectiveness of interventions to reduce compassion fatigue. However, the ProQOL was designed for social workers, and research has shown it to be less suitable to assess the work of nurses. This article synthesizes a realist review of the literature about instruments measuring nurses' professional quality of life (QOL). The following three themes emerged: (a) a robust body of literature aimed at defining professional QOL, (b) a limited historical context of the ProQOL instrument, and (c) newer instruments. Findings suggest that the ProQOL-21 and the Risk Factors for Compassion Fatigue Inventory are more specific to nursing and better suited to measure nurses' perceived professional QOL.

## AT A GLANCE

- The ProQOL is often used to assess compassion fatigue in nurses, though it was not designed for this field.
- Addressing professional QOL in oncology nurses is essential.
- Oncology nurses' professional QOL needs to be better understood and measured.

## KEYWORDS

quality of life; compassion fatigue; burnout; professional practice

## DIGITAL OBJECT IDENTIFIER

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Professional quality of life (QOL) is a psychological phenomenon comprised of compassion fatigue and compassion satisfaction (Stamm, 2010). Compassion fatigue can lead to physiologic, emotional, and cognitive decline in nurses (Stamm, 2010). Compassion fatigue among nurses has been linked to decreased morale and retention, lower quality of care, negative patient outcomes, and financial losses for hospitals (Simon et al., 2005; Slatten et al., 2011). Oncology nurses are at risk for lower professional QOL (Potter et al., 2010; Yu et al., 2016), and clinical studies on the issue are lacking (Boyle, 2011; Najjar et al., 2009). This topic is relevant because of the unknown extent of compassion fatigue among nurses related to working during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Several potential risk factors have been studied related to professional QOL. However, the effect of certain risk factors on professional QOL, such as age, experience, education, shift length, leadership, and relational caring remain unclear (Finley & Shepard, 2017; Hinderer et al., 2014; Hunsaker et al., 2015; Luquette, 2017; Romeo-Ratliff, 2014; Sacco et al., 2015; Yoder, 2010). Further research on the components of professional QOL, such as compassion fatigue, compassion satisfaction, and other risk factors, are also recommended (Coetzee & Klopper, 2010; Sorenson et al., 2016). Based on anecdotal and published descriptive literature, various professional QOL instruments are used by clinicians and nurse leaders to determine perceptions of professional QOL and the efficacy of interventions aimed at improving it (Houck, 2014; Kelly et al., 2015; Mooney et al., 2017; Potter et al., 2013).

The purpose of this realist review was to synthesize the literature related to defining and measuring nurses' professional QOL. The findings from this review will be useful for nurse researchers and clinicians interested in understanding which instruments are most suitable for assessing professional QOL in clinical practice and research.

## Methods

Realist reviews focus on applying a middle-range theory in a particular population with the purpose of understanding a theory or the means of measuring a theory within that specific population (Fawcett, 2013). This review analyzed the specificity and applicability of Stamm's (2009) Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL) to nurses. A database search of CINAHL®, PsycINFO®, and Google Scholar™ was conducted using various combinations of the following search terms: *professional QOL*, *ProQOL*, *theor\**, *instrument*, *survey*,