

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome in Nursing Practice: A Concept Analysis

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Abstract

Chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) affects approximately 0.89% of the global population, yet over 25 diagnostic criteria have been proposed since its initial definition in 1988, resulting in persistent conceptual ambiguity. This inconsistency poses significant challenges for nursing practice, including difficulties in patient identification, inconsistent assessment approaches, and a lack of standardized care pathways. This study aimed to clarify the defining characteristics of CFS through a concept analysis using Walker and Avant's eight-step method. Eight databases were systematically searched for literature published from January 1988 to December 2025, and 68 studies were included. Five core attributes were identified: persistent severe fatigue, post-exertional malaise, non-restorative sleep, cognitive impairment and/or orthostatic intolerance, and multisystem involvement. Antecedents included infections, immune dysregulation, genetics, and psychosocial stress, while consequences encompassed disability, diminished quality of life, psychological distress, social isolation, and economic burden. Based on these findings, a nursing-oriented conceptual framework was proposed, suggesting directions for practice such as prioritizing post-exertional malaise assessment, promoting energy management and pacing interventions, and positioning nurses as care coordinators within multidisciplinary teams. The framework may also inform CFS-focused nursing education and assessment instrument development. Given shared pathophysiological features reported in the literature, it offers a potential conceptual basis for post-infectious fatigue conditions such as long COVID, though empirical validation in specific populations remains necessary.