

**Nursing Education Research Conference 2020**  
**The State of Pilot Studies in Nursing Education**

**Karen H. Morin, PhD, RN, ANEF, FAAN**

*University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Kalamazoo, MI, USA*

**Purpose:** A pilot study is an important research strategy that can yield helpful information about proposed study procedures. However, published pilot studies often fail to highlight this information. Morin (2013) and Spurlock (2018) have raised issues related to information included in nursing education pilot studies. Interestingly, an evaluation of published research pilot studies addressing nursing education topics has not been reported. This study, part of a larger study evaluating the impact of pilot studies, reports the evaluation of a sample of published pilot studies addressing nursing education topics between 2018 and 2019. Well- developed pilot studies can advance the science of nursing education. The purpose of this study is to describe the quality of published pilot studies addressing nursing education topics using key elements drawn from the literature.

**Methods:** Two databases were searched: CINAHL and Medline. Key words used in the CINAHL search were “pilot study” combination with “students” and “nursing education”. Key words used in the Medline search were “pilot project” combination with “students” and “nursing education”. Inclusion criteria were: published between 2018-2019 [to allow for possible impact of the Morin (2013) and Spurlock (2018) publications]; English; key words either in the title or body of the abstract. Studies were evaluated using the following key attributes: Reason for undertaking the pilot; How feasibility of intervention assessed (if appropriate); Inclusion of feasibility objectives; Inclusion of feasibility outcomes; Inclusion of criteria for feasibility success; Description of how participants informed about feasibility of study; Results interpreted within context of feasibility - Lessons learned to make big study feasible; Appropriate use of statistics.

**Results:** A total of 434 hits were obtained between 2018-2019. All thirteen publications in 2019 meeting inclusion criteria (13/22) were included; 37/72 meeting criteria from 2018 were included. Eight papers met some but not all of the key elements. Of these, only two papers provided a rationale for conducting a pilot study. Four described how feasibility was assessed; this was the most frequent key element identified. None mentioned how informed consent highlighted the feasibility aspect of the study. Studies were published in a variety of nursing education and clinical journals such as the Journal of Nursing Education, Nursing Education Perspective, the Journal of Psychosocial Nursing, and Pain Management.

**Conclusion:** Information contained in papers reporting pilot studies does not reflect the key elements of a pilot study. Most pilot studies report on the outcomes of research, rather than on feasibility and acceptability of study procedures. Findings of this study have implications for those educating scientists, those conducting research in nursing education, and those publishing research in nursing education.

---

**Title:**

The State of Pilot Studies in Nursing Education

**Keywords:**

evaluation, nursing education and pilot study

**Abstract Summary:**

A pilot study, an important research strategy, can yield helpful information about proposed study procedures. However, published pilot studies often fail to highlight this information. This study, the first of a two-phase undertaking, reports the evaluation of a sample of published pilot studies addressing nursing education topics between 2018-2019.

**References:**

- Doody, O., & Doody, C. M. (2015). Conducting a pilot study: Case study of a novice researcher. *British Journal of Nursing*, 24 (21), 1074-1078.
- Kim, Y. (2011). The pilot study in qualitative inquiry: Identifying issues and learning lessons for culturally competent research. *Qualitative Social Work*, 10 (2), 190-206.
- Leon, A. C., Davis, L. L., & Kraemer, H. C. (2011). The role and interpretation of pilot studies in clinical research. *Journal of Psychiatry Research*, 45 (5), 626-629.
- Morin, K. H. (2013). Editorial. Value of a pilot study. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 52 (10), 547-548.
- Spurlock, D. R. (2018). Methodology Corner. What's in a name? Revisiting pilot studies in nursing education research. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 57 (8), 457-459.

**First Primary Presenting Author*****Primary Presenting Author***

Karen H. Morin, PhD, RN, ANEF, FAAN  
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
Professor Emerita  
Kalamazoo MI  
USA

**Author Summary:** Karen Morin is Professor Emeritus, the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee where she served as PhD program director, and Major Professor. Dr. Morin has held teaching positions at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Thomas Jefferson University, Widener University, the Pennsylvania State University, and Western Michigan University. She has extensive experience in nursing education, having taught students at all levels. She has published and presented nationally and internationally.