

A recipe for thriving in nursing homes: A meta-ethnography

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Funding information

The Swedish Research Council [Vetenskapsrådet], Grant/Award Number: 2014-02715; Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare [FORTE], Grant/Award Number: 2014-04016

Abstract

Aim: To explore contributors for thriving in nursing homes by evaluating, analysing and synthesizing peer-reviewed qualitative literature on the topic.

Background: Thriving is a positive life-world concept that has been explored by several qualitative studies; however, descriptions of thriving and contributors to thriving have not been compared or contrasted among different studies and contexts, nor have they been reviewed and synthesized.

Design: Qualitative meta-ethnography.

Data sources: Four electronic databases were searched in October 2019, with sources published between 2000 and 2019 included.

Review methods: Sources of peer-reviewed literature that employed qualitative methods to explore thriving in nursing homes were evaluated. In total, 1,017 sources were screened at title-level, 95 advanced to abstract-level review and 11 were assessed at full-text level. Each source was evaluated by two researchers independently in relation to methodological quality and relevance to the study aim. Themes pertaining to thriving in nursing homes were extracted, interpreted and synthesized.

Results: In total, seven sources of peer-reviewed literature were included. Two main themes illustrating the contributors to thriving were identified: ingredients for thriving (subthemes: personal contributors and social contributors) and environment for thriving (subthemes: spacial contributors and societal contributors).

Conclusion: Contributors to thriving in nursing homes include personal attributes, relationships with others, the lived environment and societal structures. Thriving for older people could thereby be defined as a holistic concept denoting lived experiences of situated contentment. Future studies should explore different temporal facets of thriving in the nursing home setting.

Impact: This meta-synthesis proposes a 'recipe' for thriving as comprising the right ingredients and the right environment, determined by the preferred 'taste' of the individual person. The proposed definition and contributors illuminate thriving as a positive life-world concept that is based on one's lived experiences and context.

Rebecca Baxter and Laura Corneliusson should be considered joint first author.

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KEYWORDS

long term care, meta-synthesis, Nursing home, older adults, residents, thriving, well-being

1 | INTRODUCTION

Given that many older persons require professional care and support as a result of physical, cognitive, and/or functional decline, development of sustainable high-quality and cost-effective long-term care services has become a priority for governments worldwide (World Health Organisation; WHO, 2017). Nevertheless, evidence about how to best assess and support health-promoting living conditions for this population remains unclear. Thriving has materialized in the literature as a positive concept with particular relevance for older people living in nursing homes (Barba et al., 2002; Bergland & Kirkevold, 2001; Sullivan & Willis, 2018). However, there appears to be a shortness of studies describing experiences of thriving in nursing homes, and little is known about how to best support thriving at individual, staff and organization-levels. In addition, no studies have explored the congruence of descriptions of thriving in nursing homes in the literature, and there has been limited evaluation of aspects that contribute to thriving which restricts opportunities for international and cross-cultural comparisons.

2 | BACKGROUND

The concept of thriving has been discussed by researchers across the lifespan as a physical or psychological state of growth, resilience and/or function (Carver, 1998; Brown et al., 2017; Bundick et al., 2010; Haight Barba et al., 2002). Thriving has been linked to the (physical or existential) environment and has been explored in relation to infancy and adolescence, as well as in relation to working and living contexts (e.g. Haight et al., 2002; Spreitzer et al., 2005). In relation to older people living in nursing homes, thriving has been said to be a useful lens through which to explore lived experiences as it allows for acknowledgement of the individual and the unique care environment and can be separated from potential age-related physical or cognitive decline and 'failure to thrive' (Bergland & Kirkevold, 2001). However, to date, only one definition combining resident and staff descriptions has been proposed for thriving in long-term care settings (Sullivan & Willis, 2018), which has been contested as it combined contradicting resident experiences and staff perceptions (Baxter, Björk & Edvardsson, 2019). By further explicating and illuminating positive life-world concepts such as thriving from the residents' perspective, we can work towards forming a functional definition for thriving that is informed by the experience of the individual themselves.

Holistic, inclusive and relational frameworks such as thriving not only support individual health, but also acknowledge the many facets of the environment and life-world that influence well-being as a whole. As there is no consensus regarding a definition for the

concept or expression of thriving for older people living in nursing homes, gaining insight into the descriptors and contributors of thriving and exploring the current literature surrounding thriving in nursing homes seems crucial to furthering our understanding (Baxter, Björk & Edvardsson, 2019). The benefit of selecting a meta-synthesis to explore existent qualitative studies on thriving in nursing homes is that it provides opportunities to construct an interpretation that may identify new concepts, theories or models from an otherwise eclectic collection of studies (Noblit & Hare, 1988). This creates the opportunity to uncover similarities, or differences, in the current knowledge base about the descriptions and contributors of thriving in nursing homes, as well as produce new insights on this under-researched topic. Therefore, the aim of this study was to explore resident-derived contributors for thriving in nursing homes by evaluating, analysing and synthesizing peer-reviewed qualitative literature on the topic. The research questions were: How is thriving for persons residing in nursing homes described in qualitative literature? Which aspects are identified as contributors for thriving in nursing homes in qualitative literature?

3 | METHODS

3.1 | Design

The purpose of a meta-ethnography is to translate qualitative research on a specific subject into a larger interpretation that integrates aspects of all findings to achieve a new combined understanding with enhanced depth and breadth (Noblit & Hare, 1988). France et al.'s (2019) eMERge reporting guidelines for conducting a qualitative meta-ethnography have been followed. This comprises a seven-phase approach, namely, (1) forming an intellectual interest, (2) deciding what is relevant to the initial interest, (3) reading the included studies, (4) determining how the studies are related, (5) translating the studies into one another, (6) synthesizing translations and (7) expressing the synthesis (France et al., 2019).

3.2 | Search methods

A literature search was undertaken (by LC and RB) in October 2019 in four databases relevant to the field of interest: Pubmed, the Cumulative Index of Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), Scopus and PsychInfo. A block search strategy was used with the keyword *thriv** (thrive, thrives, thriving, thrived), paired with terms related to the population group and setting of interest (see Table 1). The inclusion criteria were: publication in English, qualitative design, peer-reviewed studies, specifically related to the subject of thriving

in the nursing home setting and comprised of data from nursing home resident informants/participants. As there have been considerable advances in the care and housing of older people in the last two decades, as well as shifting policies in different cultural contexts, only literature published between the year 2000 and 2019 have been considered for this review to ensure relevance to the current societal and environmental context. Additional exclusion criteria were: concepts unrelated to thriving (i.e. failure to thrive), settings and population groups not related to nursing homes, quantitative or mixed-methods design, as well as book chapters, commentaries, discussion papers and review articles. The reference lists of the studies that advanced to full-text evaluation were also examined.

TABLE 1 Search terms

Keyword	Search term
Thriv*	+ Nursing home
	+ Residential care
	+ Long-term care
	+ Resident
	+ Senior
	+ Older adult
	+ Old people

3.3 | Search outcome

In total, 1,017 sources were screened at title-level for subject relevance (thriving), setting relevance (nursing home) and informant/participant relevance (nursing home residents). Following this, 95 advanced to abstract-level review and 11 were selected for full-text evaluation. The sources were discussed among the research team, and final consensus was reached about inclusion/exclusion, see the completed Prisma Flow Diagram (Figure 1).

3.4 | Quality appraisal

After the first reading, an appraisal of the sources was conducted using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist (see Table 2). All sources were deemed satisfactory for further evaluation. During the second reading, the focus was on identifying the main results and important findings. A list of the study characteristics was then compiled for comparison and evaluation (see Supplementary File).

3.5 | Data abstraction

During the extraction of the studies, LC and RB systematically reviewed the sources. As the aim of this study was not to summarize

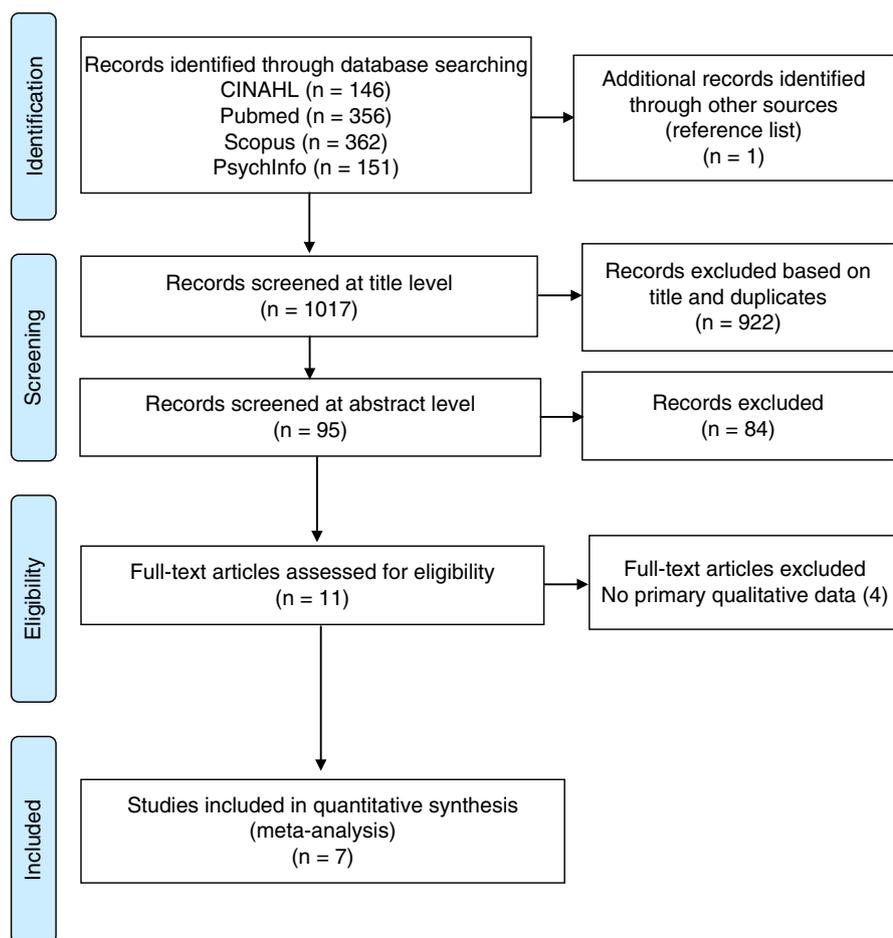


FIGURE 1 PRISMA flow diagram
[Colour figure can be viewed at
wileyonlinelibrary.com]

TABLE 2 Critical appraisal skills programme (CASP) checklist

Literature source	Clear aims	Appropriate methodology	Appropriate design	Appropriate recruitment strategy	Appropriate consideration to researcher/participant relationship	Ethical considerations	Rigorous data analysis	Clear statement of findings	Valuable research
Baxter, Sandman, Björk, Lood & Edvardsson (2019)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Bergland and Kirkevold (2005)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Bergland and Kirkevold (2006)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Bergland and Kirkevold (2008)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Ericson-Lidman (2019)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Østensen et al. (2017)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Sullivan and Willis (2018)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Note: Y = Yes; N = No; N/A = not applicable.

entire studies, but rather to identify descriptions and contributors to thriving, data were extracted from the full primary studies where descriptions and contributors were found. Several studies included mixed data, for example interviews from staff and residents (Sullivan & Willis, 2018) or a combination of resident interviews and researcher observations (Bergland & Kirkevold, 2005, 2006, 2008; Østensen et al., 2017). Here, the researchers did not extract data presented from the staff perspective, instead focussing on the resident descriptions and overall researcher interpretations. Throughout the extraction process, LC and RB repeatedly returned to the selected studies to discuss their understandings of the descriptions, and in this process identified contributors to thriving. All descriptions and contributors were listed manually. The main themes and subthemes were compared with the participant quotations in the original articles to support interpretations. The researchers reached consensus concerning their subsequent understandings, and a table with main themes was drafted.

3.6 | Determining how the studies are related

The studies were compared for differences and similarities in topics, descriptions, key metaphors, phrases, design, cultural context, theoretical approaches. The studies were found to be related through topic, while the theoretical approaches, designs and contexts differed. Meta-ethnographies are, at their core, "interpretations of interpretations of interpretations" (Noblit & Hare, 1988, p. 35), as participants express interpretations of their experiences (first-order constructs), researchers interpret participants experiences (second-order constructs) and meta-ethnographers interpret these interpretations (third-order constructs) (Noblit & Hare, 1988; Britten et al., 2002). The included studies in this meta-ethnography consisted of second-order constructs with first-order supporting evidence (Britten et al., 2002). We first read the studies and compiled the second-order constructs in a table, with supporting evidence from first-order constructs added in a separate column. A third column was used to note ideas that were stimulated during this process to inform the development of the third-order constructs. The first-, second- and third-order constructs, were listed first according to each study, and then read as a continuous whole to ensure contextual preservation of meaning (Britten et al., 2002).

3.7 | Translation of studies

During the translation, emergent results and themes from these studies illuminated different descriptions and contributors relevant to thriving for older persons residing in nursing homes. During the translation of the studies, it was discovered that the studies were largely reciprocal; the descriptions and contributors of thriving were all complementary descriptions of the same phenomenon. Many of the contributors were the same, with slight differences in wording; for example, contributors to thriving would be described

as 'satisfying social interactions and connection with others' (Sullivan & Willis, 2018) or 'positive peer relationships' (Bergland & Kirkevold, 2006). No refutational or mutually competitive translations were discovered.

As the aim of this study was to explore descriptions and contributors to thriving, ultimately exploring the similarities and differences on a holistic level (Noblit & Hare, 1988) a line-of-argument approach was adapted for this meta-ethnography. By exploring the line of argument, a 'wholeness' or bigger picture, from the data were formed (Noblit & Hare, 1988). The line-of-argument approach consists of two steps: conducting a meta-ethnographic synthesis and developing a clinical inference about the whole (Noblit & Hare, 1988).

3.8 | Synthesis process

The translation process illuminated themes in the literature sources pertaining to the descriptions and contributors to thriving for persons residing in nursing homes. The data from the primary studies were coded, following an inductive process, by writing down the identified key concepts related to thriving descriptors and contributors in a separate document. Subsequent studies were coded in the existing categories, and new categories were created as they emerged. Data were then synthesised to create themes; the categories were integrated, and four mutually dependent but related themes were identified. These themes were found to illuminate different aspects of the same phenomena, creating a line-of-argument. Meta-syntheses have been critiqued in the past for merely aggregating studies, without synthesizing and producing new data (Bondas & Hall, 2007); therefore, to exemplify the synthesis of these findings, a metaphor of a recipe was developed to incorporate the findings from these various studies.

4 | FINDINGS

4.1 | Descriptive characteristics of included sources

The seven identified sources were published between 2005 and 2019 and originated from several contexts, namely, the United States, Australia, Norway and Sweden. Three studies used a descriptive exploratory approach with interviews and field observations (Bergland & Kirkevold, 2005, 2006, 2008), one used a phenomenological hermeneutic approach (Baxter, Sandman, Björk, Lood & Edvardsson, 2019), one used qualitative content analysis (Ericson-Lidman, 2019), one used the Hybrid Model of concept development (Sullivan & Willis, 2018) and one was an exploratory intervention study (Østensen et al., 2017).

Two overarching themes and four subthemes were extracted, namely: 'ingredients for thriving', referring to personal contributors and social contributors to thriving, and 'environment for thriving',

referring to the spacial contributors and societal contributors to thriving in nursing home settings.

4.2 | Ingredients for thriving

In this main theme, two subthemes were identified as contributing towards thriving for people living in nursing homes: personal contributors and social contributors.

4.3 | Personal contributors

Contributors related to the individual person were identified as being an important 'ingredient' for thriving in nursing homes. These were described in terms of the person's attitude (Bergland & Kirkevold, 2006), striving towards acceptance of being in a nursing home (Baxter, Sandman et al., 2019), being satisfied with one's life (Ericson-Lidman, 2019) and having/finding meaning in one's life (Bergland & Kirkevold, 2005).

Well, all I can say is that I have settled in and that I am not just going to put up with it, I am going to do the best I can and be the happiest I can be here

Resident quote (Baxter et al., 2019, 863).

Your attitude is the main thing. You have to come to an agreement with yourself that you are going to stay here... I am content... You have to make up your mind to be content

Resident quote (Bergland & Kirkevold, 2006, 687).

Some studies reported different aspects as being more important than others, for example Bergland and Kirkevold (2006) outlined that having a positive mental attitude towards living in a nursing home was the innermost aspect that contributed towards thriving, while Baxter et al. (2019) discussed having options and choices in relation to how the person lives their life as being central to thriving in the nursing home context. Personal contributors also included aspects of residents' physical and/or mental health, with physical and/or cognitive decline identified as potentially negatively impacting thriving if the person is not able to not adjust or adapt to these changes (Sullivan & Willis, 2018).

If you can't accept that this is your life and you just want to be in your room,

you're not going to get that much better because your mind is telling you, you can't do anything else

Resident quote (Sullivan & Willis, 2018, p. 394).

4.4 | Social contributors

The social contributors of living in a nursing home were also identified as important 'ingredients' for thriving. The studies identified the importance of honouring preferences about relationships with other residents in the nursing home (Baxter et al., 2019; Bergland & Kirkevold, 2008; Sullivan & Willis, 2018), with people providing care in the nursing home (Baxter et al., 2019; Bergland & Kirkevold, 2005, 2006; Ericson-Lidman, 2019), and in terms of connecting with family and/or friends (Baxter et al., 2019; Bergland & Kirkevold, 2006; Ericson-Lidman, 2019; Sullivan & Willis, 2018).

It is so good when she is here [referring to her favorite caregiver]. We know each other so well. It is so important who comes into my room in the morning
Resident quote (Bergland & Kirkevold, 2006, p. 369).

I am so satisfied here, the people, they all call me by my first name ...I feel I belong here

Resident quote (Sullivan & Willis, 2018, p. 395).

These formal and informal relationships were reported to be contributors to thriving in several ways, including having the ability to choose who, and to what extent, the individual wants to socially engage with their friends, family, carers and the wider community in a physical and/or virtual sense (Baxter et al., 2019; Østensen et al., 2017) as shown by one resident's experience using technology to connect with their family and their community:

I receive photos from my sister's daughter and her children. It is very nice for me to see her children and grandchildren. I can see their new cozy home that they just bought, in the area of my hometown. I can see my brother's children, and they are all sending me messages. And my cousins, I can see them all being together at my childhood home. For me, this is incredibly nice to see.

Resident quote (Østensen et al., 2017, p. 48).

4.5 | Environment for thriving

In this main theme, two subthemes were identified as contributing towards thriving for people living in nursing homes: spacial contributors and societal contributors.

4.6 | Spacial contributors

Spacial contributors referred to the physical space of the nursing home as well as the atmosphere of the care environment. These encompassed features of the nursing home facility, attributes in

the physical environment, and the extent to which the individual feels that these aspects catered to their specific needs (Baxter et al., 2019; Bergland & Kirkevold, 2006). Spacial contributors were also described as having the ability to influence the environment around them (e.g. being able to bring things from their home into the nursing home) (Baxter et al., 2019; Ericson-Lidman, 2019), as illustrated below:

I am quite happy with everything, all of their rules and regulations. It isn't jail! I am quite happy with my room, I can do what I want with it. It is your own and you can have it how you want, within reason.

Resident quote (Baxter et al., 2019, p. 865).

Spacial contributors were further related to opportunities for activities and lifestyle options offered in (and external to) the nursing home (Baxter et al., 2019; Sullivan & Willis, 2018).

4.7 | Societal contributors

The societal contributors encompassed the policy and political foundations that support the organization of care services for older people. This refers to the welfare system, fiscal policies, allocation of resources and the political climate which all impact the quality and quantity of access to care and care provision. Thriving was often described in reference to opportunities; opportunities to go outside and/or participate in activities are described as contributors to thriving (Bergland & Kirkevold, 2006), with opportunities to exercise choice, agency, and autonomy being underlined as essential to thriving (Baxter et al., 2019). Furthermore, feeling cared for and having good quality of care was described as relevant to resident thriving (Bergland & Kirkevold, 2006; Baxter et al., 2019), as illustrated below:

On the other hand, the quality of care and caregivers was found to be essential to thriving in the sense that inadequate care, including negative experiences with caregivers, could undermine the resident's own efforts to thrive. Similarly, receiving good and adequate care from supportive and friendly caregivers supported the resident's own efforts.

Author quote (Bergland & Kirkevold, 2006, p.687).

The prerequisites for executing autonomy, choice and good quality care, such as having adequate financial resources allocated to nursing homes and a sufficient amount of staff present, were rarely overtly expressed as an element necessary for thriving, despite many of these contributors requiring extensive resources. For example, having access to digital tools such as tablets and computers to keep people connected to their families and communities was described as important to subjective experiences thriving (Østensen et al., 2017); however, this seems to be largely

dependent on the policies, and thereby financial resources, that are available.

5 | DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to explore contributors for thriving in nursing homes by evaluating, analysing and synthesizing the available qualitative literature. Two main themes illustrating the descriptions of, and contributors to, thriving of older adults living in nursing homes were identified, namely: ingredients for thriving (personal contributors and social contributors) and environment for thriving (spacial contributors and societal contributors). The findings from this meta-ethnography provide a more harmonized and cohesive understanding of thriving for persons living in nursing homes and illuminate the descriptions of thriving among different studies, leading to a proposed reconstruction of a definition for thriving. Thriving can be defined as a holistic concept denoting lived experiences of situated contentment. Contributors to thriving in nursing homes include personal attributes, relationships with others, the lived environment and societal structures. A 'recipe' for thriving in nursing homes could therefore be interpreted as comprising a combination of the right ingredients and the right environment, as determined by the preferred 'taste' of the individual person. For example, one person's recipe for thriving may require 'one cup of positive attitude', 'one teaspoon of decision-making' and 'two hours of activities in an outdoor environment'; while another person may prefer 'two tablespoons of solitude', 'half a cup of contentment' and '40 min marinating in conversation with other residents'. However, based on current knowledge, the required quantities of each contributing aspect appear to vary according to the individual, and the availability of the resources in, and around them.

The clinical implications of thriving in quantitative nursing home research support the significance of a combination of both the ingredients and the environment for thriving. For example, Björk et al. (2017) argue that activities can serve as arenas for building staff-resident relationships and facilitate staff in gaining knowledge about the residents' preferences and needs to support thriving. Environmental and atmospheric factors have also been linked to thriving, with a positive psychosocial climate, living in an unlocked facility, having access to newspapers and living in special care units shown to have significant positive associations with thriving (Björk et al., 2018). Although existing sources identify that different 'amounts' of aspects seem to contribute towards thriving, there have been no specific studies exploring incidental thriving, or thriving where one or more of these aspects are lacking or absent. In addition, possible compensatory experiences related to thriving have yet to be explored, and we do not yet know the extent to which these experiences vary between individuals and contexts.

While the provision of opportunities and agency for decision-making are emphasized as relevant aspects to thriving, the societal

prerequisites for these contributors are merely alluded to and rarely discussed explicitly in the literature, despite political and fiscal policies often directly influencing the quantity and quality of care. Our findings illuminate that access to adequate societal contributors appears to be an important requisite to thriving in the nursing home setting, and it is, therefore, necessary to consider the exploration of guiding policies and/or access to funding when reporting experiences of thriving in nursing homes. The importance of strengthening societal structures to support thriving in nursing homes has become especially pertinent during the COVID-19 pandemic, as infection-mitigating measures have disproportionately affected those who were reliant on health and social care services (Baxter, Jemberie et al., 2021; Edvardsson et al., 2020). Given the significant impact of COVID-19 on all aspects of life in nursing homes (i.e., high morbidity and mortality, social and physical isolation, staffing and resource shortages etc.), the societal implications related to residence in nursing homes, including thriving, require further explication in the wake of the pandemic.

Despite being open to refutational findings in the literature, there was no evidence to suggest negative aspects or consequences to thriving. We acknowledge that the conceptual criteria for this phenomenon has been, thus far, inherently fixed in positive paradigms and that research on the concept of thriving is immature in the sense that a consensus has not yet been reached about how to define thriving for this population group or context. In this way, our findings have synthesized the available qualitative literature on thriving and explicated key aspects that contribute towards thriving. These results contribute towards a deeper understanding of thriving of older people living in nursing homes and provide insight into how thriving can be better explored and understood in research and practice settings. Further studies should continue to explore the various facets of these personal, social, spacial and societal contributors from different ontological and epistemological paradigms, and cultural contexts, to work towards a more comprehensive understanding of thriving which can be operationalized for use in assessing and promoting thriving in nursing homes.

6 | LIMITATIONS

This study used a structured methodological approach to sourcing and appraising the literature. While meta-ethnographies are useful for integrating the results of qualitative studies, it is important to note that this method may dilute the individual perspective. Meta-syntheses have been critiqued for potentially adulterating the intricacies of original findings by amalgamating results with restricted consideration to context (Noblit & Hare, 1988); however, by examining these findings at a meta-level and offering our interpretation of the literature we may broaden the understanding and application of this knowledge for use in theory and practice. In saying that, our results represent but one of many possible interpretations of the literature. The authors come from a variety of professional backgrounds (nursing, social work, psychology) which

may be viewed as a strength in that it allowed for consideration of a variety of perspectives. As thriving is a relatively new research concept in the nursing home context, the limited number of identified sources, and the lack of diversity in these sources (i.e. multiple studies from one research group, comparable cultural contexts, high-income settings) may be seen as a further limitation. The definition and contributors for thriving provided in this manuscript may therefore undergo further innovation as new qualitative and quantitative studies emerge.

7 | CONCLUSION

Contributors for thriving appear to be inherently connected to experiences in the lived environment of the individual. A definition for thriving for older people has been proposed as a holistic concept denoting lived experiences of situated contentment. The findings of this study highlight the diverse ways in which thriving is described in the literature, and may assist individuals, health professionals, researchers and policymakers in developing a deeper understanding of the ingredients and environments that contribute to thriving. Future studies should explore different temporal facets (neutral, validating or invalidating) of thriving to extend our understanding of how thriving can be best supported for older persons living in nursing homes.

FUNDING SOURCES

Funded by The Swedish Research Council [Vetenskapsrådet](2014-02715) and Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare [FORTE] (2014-04016).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank the Umeå Health and Ageing (U-Age) research group for their valuable feedback in the development of this work.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No conflict of interest has been declared by the authors.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors have agreed on the final version and meet at least one of the following criteria [recommended by the ICMJE (<http://www.icmje.org/recommendations/>)]: Substantial contributions to conception and design, acquisition of data or analysis and interpretation of data; Drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that supports the findings of this study are available in the supplementary material of this article

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section.

How to cite this article: Baxter R, Corneliussen L, Björk S, Kloos N, Edvardsson D. A recipe for thriving in nursing homes: A meta-ethnography. *J Adv Nurs*. 2021;77:2680–2688. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.14775>

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