

Topic Area: Professional Development

Abstract Title:

The Dietetic Confidence Scale: An evidence-based tool for measuring dietitians' confidence in working with clients impacted by common mental health conditions
Buttenshaw K¹, Shakespeare-Finch J², Ash S³
¹⁻³ Queensland University of Technology/Institute of Health and Biomedical Innovation, Brisbane, Australia

Objectives: Valid and reliable evaluation tools are needed to measure dietitians' professional confidence. This research aimed to develop a tool to measure dietitians' professional confidence in working with clients impacted by common mental health conditions.

Methods: A review of practitioner confidence measures informed the development of the 'Dietetic Confidence Scale' (DCS). Two cross-sectional samples of Australian dietitians ($n=185, 458$) were recruited to test the scale. Principal Components Analysis (PCA) helped refine scale items and derive a model, which was then validated using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA).

Results: The review identified 14 instruments from 20 studies. No tools specifically measured dietitians' professional confidence in working with clients impacted by common mental health conditions. PCA results indicated a 13-item, two-factor solution accounting for 69.1% of total variance. Dietetic confidence was associated with 1) Confidence in Nutrition Care Process (NCP, $\alpha=0.95$), and 2) Confidence in Advocating for Professional Self-Care and Client-Care (ASC, $\alpha=0.81$). CFA results supported the proposed scale and model (Good Fit Index 0.95). The final scale showed good reliability ($\alpha=0.93$)

Conclusion: Dietitians need to develop and use evidence-based measures of practitioner confidence. The DCS is a psychometrically robust instrument with strong internal consistency, tested with two independent samples. The DCS can be used to measure dietitians' professional confidence about working with clients impacted by common mental health conditions, evaluate professional development that is aimed at increasing confidence, and highlight where additional support or training may be needed. Further validity and reliability testing is needed to confirm scale generalisability and use.

Significance to the field of dietetics: The DCS is an evidence-based tool useful for educators, researchers and practitioners. To improve professional confidence, dietitians should focus on developing their transferable person-centred care skills using the NCP. In addition, CPD activities involving advocacy, reflective practice, mentoring and professional self-care also contribute to dietitians' confidence in working with clients impacted by mental health conditions.