



SPECIAL ARTICLE

1977–2017: Nursing research in Spain after 40 years in the University[☆]



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Abstract Nursing research in Spain cannot be understood without analysing the development of this profession over the last 40 years. The social, political and economic context has determined the evolution of nursing research, and an analysis of the current situation is necessary to confront the immediate challenges the nursing profession has to handle. To offer a global perspective of care research in Spain as a framework for reflection and discussion on possible short and medium-term strategies that guide the planning and decision making of the different stakeholders involved in nursing research in Spain. A multi-method study combining documentary analysis with bibliometric methods was carried out. Some isolated policies to promote nursing research have been identified, a significant increase in doctoral training (49 doctoral programs) and 89 nurse research groups (1.92 groups per million inhabitants) responsible for a scientific production that puts Spain in seventh place in the world ranking of scientific production in the area of nursing. The increase in public expenditure on R&D&I and the growth in bibliometric impact are associated with a higher density of nursing research groups. Nursing research in Spain is sensitive to research promotion policies and resources, although there is no consolidated and uniform strategy that overcomes current barriers. The impact of the academic development of Spanish nursing in scientific production is still unknown.

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PALABRAS CLAVE

Investigación en Enfermería;
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1977-2017: La investigación enfermera en España tras 40 años en la Universidad

Resumen La investigación enfermera en España no puede ser entendida sin el análisis de la evolución de la profesión en los últimos 40 años. El contexto social, político y económico ha determinado el devenir de la investigación en cuidados y es necesario un análisis de la situación actual de cara a los retos inmediatos que la profesión enfermera tiene ante sí. Ofrecer una perspectiva global de la investigación en cuidados en España, como marco de reflexión y discusión acerca de posibles estrategias a corto y medio plazo que orienten la planificación y toma de decisiones a los distintos agentes implicados en la investigación enfermera en España. Estudio multimétodo que ha combinado análisis documental, con métodos bibliométricos. Se han identificado algunas políticas aisladas de fomento de la investigación en cuidados, un crecimiento importante de la formación doctoral (49 programas de doctorado) y 89 grupos de investigación enfermera (1,92 grupos por millón de habitantes) responsables de una producción científica que sitúa a España en el séptimo lugar en el ranking mundial de producción científica en el área de Enfermería. El incremento en el gasto público en I+D+I y el crecimiento en impacto bibliométrico se asocian a una mayor densidad de grupos de investigación enfermeros. La investigación enfermera en España es sensible a las políticas y recursos de fomento de la investigación, aunque no hay una estrategia consolidada y uniforme que supere las barreras actuales. Aún se desconoce el impacto del desarrollo académico de la Enfermería española en la producción científica.

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What is known?

Throughout the past 40 years nursing research has faced the major difficulties of not being a degree course, there being limited access to doctorates, difficulties in finding funding for nursing research projects or their management, a lack of research groups on care and a paucity of scientific journals with indices of quality.

What do we contribute?

This is an analysis of the current situation of nursing research in Spain, and proposals, recommendations and strategies for the promotion of care research by the responsible bodies and institutions.

Introduction

The current status of nursing research in Spain cannot be understood without studying the profession's evolution over the past 40 years. The social, political and economic context that has so notably determined the future of the nursing profession in Spain will inevitably do the same for care research. Key events have taken place on an academic level. While nursing had been a degree subject for decades in the English-speaking countries, it was not until

1977 that it became a degree course in Spain.¹ This decision enabled nursing to progress from a "technical" occupation to become a profession, and this coincided historically with the health services adopting a more holistic approach to care and the development of primary care. Nursing was one of the main drivers of this reorientation.

This stage, although important, had one momentous and repressive limitation: nursing was considered a university course, but of diploma rather than degree level. This automatically restricted access to postgraduate and doctorate study, with the accompanying consequences on research. Thus, Spanish nursing had to develop research outside the official academic circuit, either in a health or a university setting, through initiatives not included in doctorate programmes (or by studying degrees in other disciplines and gaining doctorates in other subjects). This was a clear symptom of what Freire describes as the "oppressive actions" of hegemonies to keep nurses at a lower level of education, and has been widely documented.² It was only when degree courses came into being, adapted to the European Higher Education Area, that Spanish nurses were no longer prevented from studying for a doctorate, and no longer had to gain a different degree.³

As a consequence, the thirty years between 1977 and 2007 was a period in which Spanish nurses had to develop research under conditions that were often far from optimal. However, as we shall see, the development of nursing research was not impeded.

Thus, events took place over these three decades to lessen the limitations that the restrictive academic order had imposed on research activity. In 1987, the Carlos III Health Institute (ISCIII), at that time under the Ministry of Health, decided that nurses could request competitive

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