




REVIEW

The Social Impact of Postgraduate Education in Nursing

El impacto social de la formación de postgrado en enfermería

Rose Mary Portillo¹, María Teresa Cabanillas-Chávez¹, Wilter C. Morales-García², Liset Z. Sairitupa-Sanchez², Mardel Morales-García² 

¹Unidad de Postgrado de Ciencias de la Salud, Universidad Peruana Unión. Lima, Perú

²Universidad Peruana Unión. Lima, Perú

Cite as: Portillo RM, Cabanillas-Chávez MT, Morales-García WC, Sairitupa-Sanchez LZ, Morales-García M. The Social Impact of Postgraduate Education in Nursing. *Seminars in Medical Writing and Education*.2023; 2:201. <https://doi.org/10.56294/mw2023201>


Submitted: 08-11-2022

Revised: 22-02-2023

Accepted: 14-05-2023

Published: 15-05-2023

Editor: PhD. Prof. Estela Morales Peralta 

Corresponding author: Mardel Morales-García 

ABSTRACT

Introduction: postgraduate education plays a key role in the professional development of nursing, providing advanced knowledge, specialized skills, and a comprehensive understanding of the discipline. This level of education not only enhances clinical practice but also significantly contributes to research and the generation of new knowledge. In a globalized world, nursing demands highly trained professionals who integrate theory, practice, and research to create a positive societal impact.

Objective: To analyze the significance of postgraduate education in nursing from the perspective of its social impact, based on scientific evidence.

Method: an integrative review was conducted, selecting 10 scientific articles from the Scielo and Redalyc databases, based on the inclusion criteria: publications in indexed journals in Spanish, Portuguese, or English, from the period 2008-2022.

Conclusion: postgraduate education in nursing has a significant social impact by fostering scientific production, the development of specialized skills, and critical reflection on the science of care. It is concluded that nurses with master's and doctoral degrees represent a highly qualified human resource, particularly in the areas of research and teaching.

Keywords: Nursing; Graduate Education; Health.

RESUMEN

Introducción: la formación de postgrado desempeña un papel clave en el desarrollo profesional de la enfermería, proporcionando conocimientos avanzados, habilidades especializadas y una comprensión integral de la disciplina. Este nivel educativo no sólo mejora la práctica clínica, sino que también contribuye significativamente a la investigación y a la generación de nuevos conocimientos. En un mundo globalizado, la enfermería demanda profesionales altamente capacitados que integren la teoría, la práctica y la investigación para crear un impacto social positivo.

Objetivo: analizar el significado de la formación de postgrado en enfermería desde la perspectiva de su impacto social, basado en la evidencia científica.

Método: se realizó una revisión integradora, seleccionando 10 artículos científicos de las bases de datos Scielo y Redalyc, a partir de los criterios de inclusión: publicaciones en revistas indexadas en español, portugués o inglés, del período 2008-2022.

Conclusión: la formación de postgrado en enfermería tiene un impacto social significativo al fomentar la producción científica, el desarrollo de competencias especializadas y la reflexión crítica sobre la ciencia del cuidado. Se concluye que las enfermeras con maestría y doctorado representan un recurso humano

altamente calificado, particularmente en las áreas de investigación y docencia.

Palabras clave: Enfermería; Educación de Posgrado; Salud.

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, nursing education has evolved from a traditional pedagogical approach focused on knowledge transmission to a comprehensive and holistic model, where theory and practice are harmoniously interconnected. This transformation has enabled professionals to develop essential competencies to address health issues critically, strengthening their impact on both research and clinical practice (Chrizostimo & Brandão, 2015; Barco Díaz et al., 2012; López et al., 2017; Raya, 2011; Álvarez-Nieto et al., 2017). Postgraduate education, including advanced levels such as master's and doctoral degrees, plays a crucial role in nursing specialization. While a master's degree provides a disciplinary foundation and an introduction to research, a doctorate focuses on the generation of innovative knowledge through rigorous scientific investigation (Becerra Romero, 2017; Fuentes, 2016; Contreras Gutiérrez & Urrutia Aguilar, 2017).

The growth of postgraduate nursing education at the international level has been significant in recent decades. As of the first semester of 2009, a total of 386 doctoral programs in nursing were identified worldwide, with America representing 47 %, Europe 31 %, Asia 11 %, Oceania 6 %, and Africa 5 %. The United States leads with 145 programs, followed by the United Kingdom with 79 and Australia with 20. In Latin America, Brazil, Chile, and Colombia have been pioneers in implementing postgraduate nursing programs, enabling professionals to access higher levels of specialization (Bueno Robles et al., 2010; Soto Lesmes, 2011; Rodrigues et al., 2015; Munari et al., 2014; Valenzuela-Suazo & Sanhueza-Alvarado, 2015). In Colombia, the number of doctoral nursing programs grew from 32 in 2001 to 76 in 2008, with the National University of Colombia being one of the leading institutions in this process, strengthening the discipline and its impact on healthcare (Soto Lesmes, 2011).

Several studies highlight that postgraduate education is fundamental to improving the quality of healthcare services. Reports indicate that 96,63 % of nurses consider this training “highly necessary,” and 95,50 % state that it contributes to excellence in healthcare service delivery (Barco Díaz et al., 2012; Helena De Bortoli Cassiani et al., 2018). The *Triple Impact of Nursing* report emphasizes the importance of advanced training in addressing healthcare needs stemming from demographic and epidemiological changes, underscoring the necessity of adapting nursing education to social demands and aligning it with public health policies (Palucci Marziale & Garcia de Lima, 2015; Pulcini & Lang, 2020).

Postgraduate education in nursing allows professionals to expand their knowledge, strengthen their clinical judgment, and enhance their autonomy in decision-making (Aygul & Senyuva, 2024). According to the American Nurses Association (ANA), this level of education equips nurses with critical skills for analysis, evidence-based decision-making, and the implementation of innovative patient care practices (Doughty et al., 2021). Moreover, nurses with advanced education demonstrate greater adherence to evidence-based practices, reduce the incidence of medical errors, and improve patient safety. A study conducted in Finnish hospitals revealed that postgraduate-trained nurses had higher competency in utilizing clinical guidelines and making therapeutic decisions (Heikkilä et al., 2024).

The social impact of postgraduate education is also evident in the transition of new graduates into clinical practice. Training programs that include postgraduate courses have been shown to facilitate the adaptation of newly graduated nurses, providing them with greater confidence and preparation to manage the complexities of hospital settings. A comparative study in New Zealand found that nurses who participated in postgraduate transition programs achieved better outcomes in clinical knowledge and diagnostic skills than those without such training (Doughty et al., 2021). Additionally, advanced education has been identified as a factor in reducing professional attrition rates, as it provides tools to manage work-related stress and strengthens commitment to the profession (Theobald et al., 2023). Furthermore, postgraduate education drives innovation in healthcare. Nurses with advanced education have demonstrated superior proficiency in using digital technologies for patient monitoring, clinical data management, and applying artificial intelligence in medical decision-making (Aygul & Senyuva, 2024). This not only optimizes healthcare system efficiency but also enhances the personalization of patient care.

Beyond the hospital setting, postgraduate education has significant implications for public health and social well-being. Nurses with advanced training lead community health promotion and disease prevention programs, playing a crucial role in shaping health policies and implementing primary care strategies focused on prevention. The collaboration between universities and hospitals in designing educational programs aligned with the healthcare sector's needs has been instrumental in achieving this impact (Theobald et al., 2023). Consequently, postgraduate education in nursing is consolidated as an essential pillar for strengthening healthcare systems and improving the quality of life of the populations served. For this reason, the objective of this study is to

understand the significance of postgraduate education for nursing professionals from a perspective of its social contributio

METHOD

This study conducted an integrative review (Moreno et al., 2018) on postgraduate education in nursing professionals, focusing on its social contributions.

A total of 10 scientific articles were selected from the Scielo and Redalyc databases, based on the following inclusion criteria: scientific articles published in indexed journals in Spanish, Portuguese, or English between 2008 and 2022. To align with the study objective, the search in Spanish included keywords such as “*formación posgradual*”, “*aportes sociales de enfermería*”, “*pertinencia profesional*”, and “*enfermería*”. In Portuguese, the terms “*formação de pós-graduação*”, “*contribuições sociais de enfermagem*”, “*relevância profissional*”, and “*Enfermagem*” were used. In English, the keywords “*postgraduate training*”, “*social contributions of nursing*”, “*professional relevance*”, and “*nursing*” were applied. To refine the search, Boolean operators were used: “Y”, “O” in Spanish; “E”, “OU” in Portuguese; and “AND”, “OR” in English.

Initially, 20 studies with titles related to the study objective were identified. However, 5 were excluded for being outside the inclusion period or due to duplication, leaving a total of 15 preselected articles. Finally, after a process of critical reading and synthesis, 10 studies were selected, excluding those whose results or conclusions were not aligned with the objective of this research.

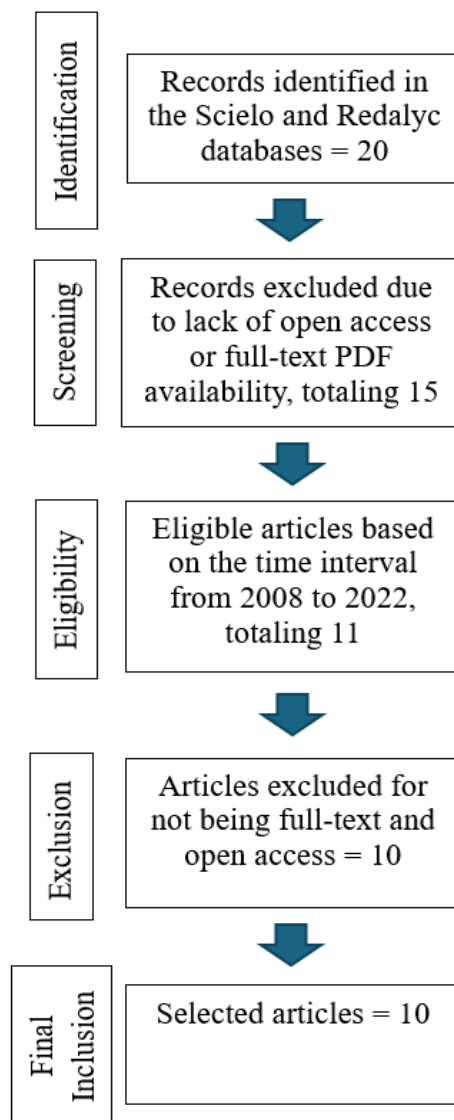


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram of the study selection and screening process

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The rapid geopolitical and social changes of today have significantly impacted community well-being,

sociodemographic profiles, public policies, and disease incidence. In this context, nursing has evolved through various fields of action, where practice, theory, and research form a fundamental triad for its social impact. Postgraduate education in nursing emerges as a key element in addressing these changes and responding effectively to transformations in the healthcare sector (Pulcini & Lang, 2020).

Nursing research plays a crucial role in describing, explaining, and developing healthcare strategies. The need to build theoretical and conceptual frameworks centered on the health-disease-context-human development relationship has been emphasized, promoting social participation as an essential pillar (Ibarra Mendoza et al., 2011). However, nursing research presents disparities at a global level: while in some countries, nurse participation in research remains low, in others, it has become more consolidated, leading to improvements in the quality of care and living standards (Raya, 2011).

The role of higher education in nursing professional training is fundamental, as it allows for an interconnected approach with society and responds to specific social needs (Cruz et al., 2012). Furthermore, advanced nursing education has been associated with improvements in healthcare services and the social perception of the profession, highlighting the importance of expanding research and disseminating knowledge in global health (Preto et al., 2015).

Continuous professional development in nursing is essential for the transformation of the healthcare sector. Training should be ongoing, beginning in basic education and continuing throughout a nurse's career (Ortega et al., 2015). However, some studies suggest that postgraduate education does not necessarily generate immediate social transformations, as newly graduated doctoral professionals often do not perceive a direct societal impact (Gomes et al., 2016). Nonetheless, it is acknowledged that consolidating a highly qualified workforce remains a key challenge in countries such as Brazil, where strengthening methodological rigor and intellectual production in nursing is necessary to maximize its social impact (Souza da Silva, 2015).

Master's programs in nursing are closely linked to universal health access and equitable healthcare coverage. In countries such as the United States and Canada, advanced practice nurses benefit from strong social recognition and well-established regulatory frameworks, whereas in Brazil and other Latin American countries, professional recognition and regulation still face significant barriers (Scochi et al., 2015). Similarly, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have been insufficiently addressed in doctoral nursing theses in Brazil, despite their relevance to economic development and quality-of-life improvements (Rodrigues et al., 2015). Encouraging research focused on nursing's social impact is crucial to maximizing its contribution to population well-being.

Postgraduate nursing education also fosters the creation and expansion of international research collaboration networks, facilitating the development of strategies to enhance scientific production and its impact on social reality (Martini et al., 2018). Although the primary goal of postgraduate education is to train professionals in teaching and research, its potential for professional transformation and improvements in clinical practice is also recognized (da Costa et al., 2014).

Additionally, nurses' motivation to pursue a master's degree is often driven by their interest in acquiring new knowledge and improving their practices, whether in patient care or academia (Ferreira et al., 2016). Despite the economic and professional benefits of advanced education, its social impact is equally crucial, as it strengthens the perception of nursing as an essential profession within society and the healthcare system.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the fundamental role of postgraduate education in nursing as a central pillar in transforming the healthcare sector and improving the quality of life of the populations served. The findings demonstrate that advanced education not only strengthens clinical competencies and evidence-based decision-making but also fosters research, innovation, and health policy development. However, challenges remain in achieving equitable social and regulatory recognition across different regions, which limits the immediate impact of master's and doctoral programs on healthcare delivery. Future research should focus on longitudinal evaluations of the effects of postgraduate education on professional practice and access to quality healthcare services, as well as on identifying strategies to optimize the integration of this knowledge into clinical and community settings. In this regard, the consolidation of international collaboration networks and the reinforcement of methodological rigor in postgraduate training programs are essential for maximizing nursing's contribution to social well-being.

REFERENCES

1. Álvarez-Nieto, C., López-Medina, I. M., Abad, M. L., Grande-Gascón, M. L., & Álvarez-García, C. (2017). Curriculum nurse and strategies training on environmental sustainability and climate change TT - Currículum enfermero y estrategias pedagógicas en materia de sostenibilidad medioambiental en los procesos de salud y cuidado. *Enfermería Global*, 16(3), 665-678. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.6018/eglobal.16.3.243151>

2. Araujo Martínez, E., Souza, S. R., & Romijn Tocantins, F. (2012). As contribuições das representações sociais para a investigação em saúde e enfermagem. *Investigación y Educación En Enfermería*, 30(1), 101-107.
3. Aygul, N. S., & Senyuva, E. (2024). Effects of postgraduate education on nursing and reflections in the clinic field: A qualitative research. *International Journal of Nursing Education*.
4. Barco Díaz, V., Jimenez Alvarez, V. D., & Salabarría Diaz, N. (2012). El desarrollo de la enseñanza de postgrado en Enfermería. 10(2), 151-162.
5. Becerra Romero, A. T. (2017). Alcances y limitaciones del posgrado en la Universidad Autónoma de Nayarit. *Revista de La Educacion Superior*, 46(183), 105-121. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resu.2017.05.003>
6. Bueno Robles Luz Stella, Díaz Heredia Luz Patricia, Mejía Rojas María Elena, & López Lucero. (2010). Overview of the doctoral education in nursing Panorama da formação doutoral em enfermagem. *Avances En Enfermería*, 28(2), 134-144. <https://doi.org/https://revistas.unal.edu.co/index.php/avenferm/article/view/21388/22358>
7. Chrizostimo, M. M., & Brandão, A. A. P. (2015). La formación profesional del enfermero: estado del arte. *Enfermería Global*, 14(4), 414. <https://doi.org/10.6018/eglobal.14.4.208841>
8. Contreras Gutiérrez, O., & Urrutia Aguilar, M. E. (2017). Trascendencia de un programa de posgrado en sus egresados. *Revista Iberoamericana de Educación*, 74(1), 59-74. <https://doi.org/10.35362/rie741626>
9. Cruz, E. R. B., Perea, R. S. S., García, L. H., Oliva, B. F., & Cao, N. N. (2012). La formación de educadores en salud y la pertinencia de la maestría en educación médica. *Revista Cubana de Educacion Medica Superior*, 26(4), 562-575.
10. da Costa, C. M. M., Chagas, H. M. de A., Matsukura, T. S., Vieira, G. I., Marqueze, E. C., López, C. G., Ghelardi, I. R., Lefèvre, A., & Lefèvre, F. (2014). Contribuições da pós-graduação na área da saúde para a formação profissional: Relato de experiência. *Saude e Sociedade*, 23(4), 1471-1481. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-12902014000400028>
11. Doughty, L., Sinnema, C., McKillop, A., & Dixon, R. (2021). The impact of postgraduate education in transition to practice programmes on new graduate nurses' knowledge and skills: A pre- post survey design. *Nurse Education Today*, 102. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2021.104888>
12. Ferreira, R., Tavares, C., dos Santos, G., Manhães, L., Marcondes, F., & Fellipe, T. (2016). Perfil Motivacional E Demográfico Dos Alunos Do Mestrado Acadêmico E Profissional. *Revista Portuguesa de Enfermagem de Saúde Mental*, 4(spe4), 77-84. <https://doi.org/10.19131/rpesm.0145>
13. Fuentes, S. G. (2016). El crecimiento de los posgrados en educación en Argentina. Notas acerca de la estructura de la oferta y las políticas de evaluación. *Avaliação: Revista Da Avaliação Da Educação Superior (Campinas)*, 21(3), 859-900. <https://doi.org/10.1590/s1414-40772016000300011>
14. Gomes, D. C., Prado, M. L. do, Canever, B. P., Jesus, B. H. de, Sebold, L. F., & Backes, V. M. S. (2016). Doctor of Nursing: Capacity for Building a Professional and Scientific Career Project Tt - Doutor Em Enfermagem: Capacidade De Construção Do Projeto De Carreira Profissional E Científica Tt - Doctor En Enfermería: Capacidad De Construcción Del Proyecto . *Texto & Contexto - Enfermagem*, 25(3), 1-9.
15. Helena De Bortoli Cassiani, S., Claudio, J., Lira, G., & li, N. (2018). Perspectivas de la Enfermería y la Campaña Nursing Now. *Rev Bras Enferm [Internet]*, 71(5), 2491-2493.
16. Ibarra Mendoza, T. X., Noreña Peña, A. L., & Rojas, J. G. (2011). Visibilidad de la disciplina enfermera: El factor mediático de la investigación. *Index de Enfermeria*, 20(4), 252-256. <https://doi.org/10.4321/S1132-12962011000300009>
17. López, M., Pozo, E., Gerra, E., & Torres, C. (2017). Evolución histórica de la formación de los recursos humanos en Enfermería. *Mayo*, 21(3), 406-414.

18. Martini, J. G., Pereira do Nascimento, E. R., & De Andrade, S. R. (2018). Internacionalización del posgrado en enfermería. 27(1), 1-2.

19. Moreno, B., Muñoz, M., Cuellar, J., Domancic, S., & Villanueva, J. (2018). Revisiones Sistemáticas: definición y nociones básicas. *Revista Clínica de Periodoncia, Implantología y Rehabilitación Oral*, 11(3), 184-186. <https://doi.org/10.4067/s0719-01072018000300184>

20. Munari, D. B., Parada, C. M. G. de L., Gelbcke, F. de L., Silvino, Z. R., Ribeiro, L. C. M., & Scochi, C. G. S. (2014). Mestrado profissional em enfermagem: Produção do conhecimento e desafios. *Revista Latino-Americana de Enfermagem*, 22(2), 204-210. <https://doi.org/10.1590/0104-1169.3242.2403>

21. Ortega, M. del C. B., Cecagno, D., Llor, A. M. S., de Siqueira, H. C. H., Montesinos, M. J. L., & Soler, L. M. (2015). Academic training of nursing professionals and its relevance to the workplace. *Revista Latino-Americana de Enfermagem*, 23(3), 404-410. <https://doi.org/10.1590/0104-1169.0432.2569>

22. Palucci Marziale, M. H., & Garcia de Lima, R. A. (2015). Doctorate education and producing knowledge in nursing. *Revista Latino-Americana de Enfermagem*, 23(3), 361-362. <https://doi.org/10.1590/0104-1169.0000.2563>

23. Preto, V. A. line, Batista, J. M. F., Ventura, C. A. parecida A., & Mendes, I. A. mélia C. (2015). Reflecting on nursing contributions to global health. *Revista Gaúcha de Enfermagem / EENFUFRGS*, 36, 267-270. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1983-1447.2015.esp.56643>

24. Pulcini, J. A., & Lang, C. S. (2020). Estrategias para optimizar la profesión de enfermería como socio clave para mejorar la atención primaria en todo el hemisferio. *Suparyanto Dan Rosad* (2015, 5(3), 248-253.

25. Raya, D. A. (2011). La investigación en enfermería en América Latina 2000-2010. *Revista Habanera de Ciencias Medicas*, 10(3), 396-409.

26. Rodrigues, R. A. P., Robazzi, M. L. do C. C., Erdmann, A. L., Fernandes, J. D., de Barros, A. L. B. L., & Ramos, F. R. S. (2015). Doctoral theses from nursing postgraduate programs in Brazil and their association with the millennium development goals. *Revista Latino-Americana de Enfermagem*, 23(3), 395-403. <https://doi.org/10.1590/0104-1169.0667.2565>

27. Scochi, C. G. S., Gelbcke, F. L., Ferreira, M. de A., & Alvarez, Â. M. (2015). Mestrado profissional: potencial contribuição para a Enfermagem de Prática Avançada. *Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem*, 68(6), 1186-1189. <https://doi.org/10.1590/0034-7167.2015680626i>

28. Soto Lesmes, V. (2011). El doctorado en enfermería en la Universidad Nacional de Colombia. *Avances En Enfermería*, XXIX(2), 223-224.

29. Souza da Silva, R. (2015). Pós-graduação e a pesquisa em enfermagem na América Latina: avanços e desafios. *Revista CUIDARTE*, 6(2), 1019. <https://doi.org/10.15649/cuidarte.v6i2.307>

30. Theobald, K. A., Fox, R., Burridge, C., Thomson, B., & Fox, A. (2023). Leveraging university-industry partnerships to optimise postgraduate nursing education. *BMC Nursing*, 22(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12912-023-01419-1>

31. Valenzuela-Suazo, S., & Sanhueza-Alvarado, O. (2015). Gaining a doctorate in nursing in Chile: A path not without its difficulties. *Revista Latino-Americana de Enfermagem*, 23(3), 379-386. <https://doi.org/10.1590/0104-1169.0634.2568>

FINANCING

None.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION

Conceptualization: Rose Mary Portillo, María Teresa Cabanillas-Chávez, Wilter C. Morales-García, Liset Z.

Sairitupa-Sanchez, Mardel Morales-García.

Data curation: Rose Mary Portillo, María Teresa Cabanillas-Chávez, Wilter C. Morales-García, Liset Z. Sairitupa-Sanchez, Mardel Morales-García.

Formal analysis: Rose Mary Portillo, María Teresa Cabanillas-Chávez, Wilter C. Morales-García, Liset Z. Sairitupa-Sanchez, Mardel Morales-García.

Writing - original draft: Rose Mary Portillo, María Teresa Cabanillas-Chávez, Wilter C. Morales-García, Liset Z. Sairitupa-Sanchez, Mardel Morales-García.

Writing - proofreading and editing: Rose Mary Portillo, María Teresa Cabanillas-Chávez, Wilter C. Morales-García, Liset Z. Sairitupa-Sanchez, Mardel Morales-García.