

## Corresponding author



Angela Aparecida Peters  
E-mail:  
angelapeters.sh@gmail.com

## Public health visiting nurses in Spain: 1923 to 1936

Enfermeiras visitadoras de saúde pública na Espanha: 1923 a 1936  
Enfermeras visitadoras de salud pública en España: 1923 a 1936

**Angela Aparecida Peters<sup>I</sup>**  
**Mercedes de Dios-Aguado<sup>II</sup>**  
**Tânia Cristina Franco Santos<sup>I</sup>**  
**Camila Pureza Guimarães da Silva<sup>I</sup>**  
**Renata Simões Monteiro<sup>I</sup>**  
**María Sagrario Gómez-Cantarino<sup>III</sup>**

<sup>I</sup> Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro – UFRJ, Escola de Enfermagem Anna Nery – EEAN, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Enfermagem. Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brasil.

<sup>II</sup> Centro Salud Yepes – SESCOAM. Toledo, España.

<sup>III</sup> Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, Departamento de Enfermería, Fisioterapia e Terapia Ocupacional. Toledo, Castilla-La Mancha, España.

### How to cite this article (Vancouver):

Peters AA, Dios-Aguado M, Santos TCF, Silva CPG, Monteiro RS, Gómez-Cantarino MS. Public health visiting nurses in Spain: 1923 to 1936. *Hist Enferm Rev Eletr.* 2025;16:e008. <https://doi.org/10.51234/here.2025.v16.497>.

## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** to analyze the first initiatives for training visiting nurses in public health in Spain from 1923 to 1936. **Method:** a historical-social study grounded in the history of nursing, with a qualitative documentary design. **Results:** the study period was marked by a turbulent time in Spanish history, affected by several issues, including the Riff War, the Spanish Civil War and its post-war period. However, visiting nurses played an important role in Spanish public health, providing assistance to the poor, caring for families and contributing to the development of the population's health. **Final considerations:** the training of public health nurses in Spain has been significantly influenced by different entities and institutions, including the Spanish Red Cross and the Rockefeller Foundation.

**Descriptors:** Nursing; History of Nursing; Education, Nursing; Public Health; Spain; Red Cross; Nurses, Community Health; Warfare.

## RESUMO

**Objetivo:** analisar as primeiras iniciativas de formação de enfermeiras visitadoras de saúde pública na Espanha no período de 1923 a 1936. **Métodos:** estudo de abordagem histórico-social, fundamentado na história da enfermagem, com delineamento documental de caráter qualitativo. **Resultados:** o período do estudo foi marcado por um momento turbulento na história da Espanha, afetado por várias questões, incluindo a Guerra do Rife, a Guerra Civil Espanhola e seu período pós-guerra. No entanto, as enfermeiras visitadoras desempenharam papel importante na saúde pública espanhola, prestavam ajuda aos pobres, cuidavam das famílias e contribuíam para o desenvolvimento da saúde da população. **Considerações finais:** a formação de enfermeiras de saúde pública na Espanha foi significativamente influenciada por diferentes entidades e instituições, como a Cruz Vermelha Espanhola e a Fundação Rockefeller.

**Descritores:** Enfermagem; História da Enfermagem; Educação em Enfermagem; Saúde Pública; Espanha; Cruz Vermelha; Enfermeiros de Saúde Comunitária; Guerra.

## RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** analizar las primeras iniciativas de formación de enfermeras visitantes de salud pública en España de 1923 a 1936. **Método:** estudio de enfoque histórico-social fundamentado en la historia de la enfermería, con un diseño documental de carácter cualitativo. **Resultados:** el período de estudio estuvo marcado por un momento convulso en la historia de España, afectado por diversas cuestiones, entre ellas la Guerra del Riff, la Guerra Civil Española y su posguerra. Sin embargo, las enfermeras visitantes desempeñaron un papel importante en la sanidad pública española, prestando ayuda a los pobres, atendiendo a las familias y contribuyendo al desarrollo de la salud de la población. **Consideraciones finales:** la formación de enfermeras de salud pública en España se ha visto significativamente influenciada por diferentes entidades e instituciones, como Cruz Roja Española y la Fundación Rockefeller.

**Descritores:** Enfermería; Historia de la Enfermería; Educación en Enfermería; Salud Pública; España; Cruz Roja; Enfermeros de Salud Comunitaria; Guerra.

## INTRODUCTION

Public health (PH) nursing is a fundamental specialty for social development that contributes to promoting the health of groups of people. The professional phase of nursing began to take shape in various countries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with a greater emphasis placed on it in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as was the case with Brazilian, Argentine, Portuguese, and Spanish nursing<sup>(1)</sup>. In these countries, Florence Nightingale's influence on the field of health meant that the nursing profession was at the center of reforms related to patient care<sup>(2)</sup>. Florence Nightingale's model of care was developed from the concepts of the person, the environment, nursing, health, and disease, and is currently known as environmentalist theory<sup>(3)</sup>.

Regarding Spanish nursing specifically, the *Real Escuela de Enfermeras de Santa Isabel de Hungría* (1896) is considered the country's first nursing school. Founded by surgeon Federico Rubio y Gali at the *Instituto Quirúrgico de Terapéutica Operatoria* in Madrid, Spain, it was established as a training program for non-religious women who provided nursing care. The school provided training for non-religious women who provided nursing care. Furthermore, the school was heavily influenced by the Anglo-Saxon model<sup>(4)</sup>. Dr. Rubio's goal was to provide a livelihood for women who cared for the sick in private homes or hospitals. The *Instituto Quirúrgico de Terapéutica Operatoria* was one of the most important healthcare centers during the transition from the 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>(4,5)</sup>. For centuries, activities related to caring for the sick and training nurses were the responsibility of religious orders such as the *Hermanas de San Juan de Dios* and the *Hijas de la Caridad de San Vicente de Pául*<sup>(6)</sup>.

In this regard, religious nurses belonging to different orders and congregations constituted the majority group providing care to patients in hospitals. However, during the transition from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a singular male figure emerged: the “practitioner”. They assisted surgeons during surgeries, administered injections, cared for wounds, and performed prescribed treatments. They also worked in homes and rural areas<sup>(4,6)</sup>.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Spain underwent significant changes to its health policy. There were not enough human resources to mitigate the health inequalities suffered by citizens. In an effort to improve hospital care and alleviate suffering, Queen Victoria Eugenie of Battenberg and Carmen Angolotti y Mesa established the institution’s *Cuerpo de Damas Enfermeras* in 1914<sup>(7,8)</sup>. The queen’s desire for nursing to acquire the importance and development it deserves led to the first official course being launched on February 1, 1915<sup>(8)</sup>.

The petition that the religious order of the Servants of Mary, Ministers to the Sick, presented to King Alfonso XIII in 1915 requesting official recognition of nursing degree can be considered a historic milestone for the Spanish nursing profession. Thus, on May 21, 1915, the Ministry of Public Education and Fine Arts approved the first curriculum with the minimum educational requirements to obtain the title of nurse and practice the profession, as ordered by royal decree. In June of that same year, 36 Servants of Mary became the first qualified nurses in Spain<sup>(9)</sup>.

The official regulation of nursing training in Spain was favored by various entities and interests, including the Catholic Church, the Red Cross, and physicians. The latter were responsible for conducting training, developing teaching programs, writing textbooks, teaching classes, and examining candidates<sup>(4,10)</sup>.

In 1918, Queen Victoria Eugenia of Battenberg and Carmen Angolotti y Mesa convinced the Supreme Assembly to transfer ownership of the *Casa de Salud San José y Santa Adela* to the *Hospital Central de la Cruz Roja San José y Santa Adela*, thus establishing Spain’s first school for professional nurses. The Madrid nursing school offered a two-year program<sup>(7-11)</sup>. However, the first examinations were carried out in 1923, due to the social and health tragedy caused by the catastrophe of the Battle of Annual<sup>(7,8,10)</sup>.

Visiting nurses in Spain developed their work activities in the 20<sup>th</sup> century during the dictatorships of General Miguel Primo de Rivera (1923–1930) and General Dámaso Berenguer (1930–1931), as well as during the reign of Alfonso XIII and the Second Spanish Republic (1931–1936). These professionals put Spain at the forefront of health policy compared to other democratic European nations. However, the arrival of Francisco Franco’s dictatorship (1936–1975) caused a collapse in Spain, paralyzing all health reforms that had been developed, including visiting nurses’ work<sup>(11)</sup>. As Carlos, Muñoz, and Padilha<sup>(12)</sup> have highlighted, a new process of restructuring Spanish nursing began in the 1950s under the Franco regime, marked by changes in teaching and the professionalization of the category<sup>(12)</sup>.

The country’s political stability prompted attempts at change, particularly in the health sector. In 1922, the Spanish government allowed the Rockefeller Foundation (RF) to enter the country to conduct health studies. Since the United States (US) was in a strong economic position worldwide after World War I, the RF expanded its medical research to other continents and invested in training physicians and nurses. This collaboration was instrumental in establishing nursing schools in Ibero-America, most of which adopted Nightingale’s principles of nursing<sup>(13)</sup>.

## OBJECTIVE

To analyze the first training initiatives for PH visiting nurses in Spain between 1923 and 1936.

## METHODS

This study employed a historical-social approach rooted in the history of nursing and utilized a qualitative documentary design. Data collection was based on historical sources, such as institutional reports, official documents, and journals, to analyze the first training initiatives for visiting nurses in Spain between 1923 and 1936. The research was conducted during the sandwich doctorate, under a co-supervision regime at the *Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha* (UCLM) in Toledo, Spain, in the second semester of 2021, promoted by the *Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior*, through the Graduate Program in Nursing at *Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro*, Brazil.

The time frame corresponds to the period in which the RF and RC trained the first PH visiting nurses in the country, i.e., between 1923 and 1936, when the RF left the country due to the beginning of Civil War.

Historical sources were located in the archives of Talavera de la Reina, Toledo, and Madrid in Spain. Sources were included if they were related to the movement to create the visiting nurse course. Sources were selected based on relevance, direct origin, intentionality, similarity, and relevance of content, as well as the quality and quantity of printed material found in relation to the object of study<sup>(14)</sup>.

The sources were organized using a matrix containing the following data: content description, author, source collection, and topic. Subsequently, the material was then read and the relevant information was separated into a Microsoft Excel<sup>®</sup> spreadsheet. The organization, treatment, and analysis of the collected data occurred between March and June 2023. Data treatment was performed by analyzing similarity and relevance of content<sup>(14)</sup>.

**Ethical aspects**

This study was approved by the UCLM Research Ethics Committee in Toledo, Spain. Furthermore, the study followed all precepts outlined in the National Health Council’s norms and guidelines, as defined in Resolutions 466/2012 and 510/2016. Based on these regulations and Law 12,527/2011, which states that research using publicly available information is exempt from analysis and opinion by Research Ethics Committees, this study proceeded while ensuring all other procedures and guarantees were met.

The documents referenced in this article are part of collections belonging to Spanish institutions that attest to the internal and external credibility of their sources and are open for consultation, according to their specific rules.

Primary sources of royal orders were consulted for the research and referenced in the bibliography (Chart 1).

**Chart 1 – Primary documentary sources consulted**

Year	Content	Place
1924	Royal Decree of December 9, 1924. Creation of <i>Escuela Nacional de Sanidad</i> .	<i>Centro de Documentación de Cruz Roja Española</i> , Madrid, Spain
1932	Royal Decree of April 7, 1932. Provides for the provision of several vacancies for visiting nurses in anti-tuberculosis dispensaries.	<i>Biblioteca Nacional de España</i> , Madrid, Spain

Source: Prepared by the authors (2025).

**RESULTS**

The PH visiting nurse role was created based on the *Liga de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja’s* guidelines during the international nursing course celebration held in London from October 1922 to July 1923<sup>(8,14)</sup>. The course aimed to train PH nurses to care for people’s health based on the principle that “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”<sup>(8)</sup>. In 1923, Queen Victoria Eugenie of Battenberg selected María Luisa Martínez de Aguilar y Pedroso to undergo training at Bedford College in London under the direction of Katherine Olmsted<sup>(15)</sup> (Figure 1).

The dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera brought about some changes in health policy, particularly in the health sector. The Spanish government allowed the RF to enter the country to modernize health structures, and professionals conducted health studies in the US from 1922 onward.

Data analysis shows that there was a need for specialized PH nurses throughout the Spanish health system, including the queen. After the Rif War ended in 1927, Queen Victoria Eugenie of Battenberg sent Mercedes Milá y Nolla to London to study at Bedford College<sup>(7,12,16)</sup>. Mercedes Milá y Nolla studied nursing at the RC and obtained her diploma on June 3, 1921 at the age of 25 and founded the *Escuela de Enfermeras Sanitarias* in 1935<sup>(16)</sup>.

Therefore, following Florence Nightingale’s model of care, which was prevalent at Bedford College, the nurses who studied there received high-quality theoretical and practical training. They had to pass a final exam to earn their PH nurse qualification<sup>(12,15,16)</sup>. In 1929, Queen Victoria Eugenie of Battenberg and Carmen Angolotti y Mesa developed the visiting nurse sector. The sector consisted of 12 nurses who provided adequate care to patients in their homes and guided them on hygiene standards and guidelines necessary to preserve their health<sup>(11,12,16)</sup>.



**Figure 1** - Queen Vitória Eugênia of Battenberg

Source: Biblioteca Nacional de España (1926).

This initiative emerged as a response to a set of emerging social and health needs in post-war Spain, marked by high mortality rates from infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and typhoid fever, aggravated by precarious housing conditions, lack of basic sanitation, and low levels of health literacy. In this context, visiting nurses' work was essential in providing healthcare directly to people's homes and promoting health education and disease prevention, especially among the working classes<sup>(17,18)</sup>.

In addition to these activities, visiting nurses worked in factories, schools on the outskirts of large cities, health centers, orphanages, and nursing homes for patients with physical and mental disabilities<sup>(12-15)</sup>. In addition, they promoted health education in the community through illustrations, posters and exhibitions, and also gave conferences and lectures, promoting vaccination campaigns<sup>(8-12)</sup>. Thus, through their work, they promoted hygiene in its various forms: individual, collective, and urban. They performed this role with zeal and self-interest, in addition to taking on the great responsibility of caring for the poor<sup>(8-16)</sup>. Visiting nurses were responsible for visiting the homes of those who were unable to attend appointments due to health conditions. There, they provided care such as dressing wounds, administering injectable medications, applying simple bandages, and distributing donations received by the institution, usually consisting of essential items<sup>(15,17-19)</sup>.

In 1930, Gustavo Pittaluga, a physician, biologist and professor at the School of Medicine of Madrid, who had represented Spain at meetings of the Health Committee of the League of Nations since 1924, was appointed the first director of the *Escuela Nacional de Sanidad* (ENS)<sup>(16)</sup>. His good relationships with members of the International Health Board (IHB), who worked in the country in the field of health, helped expedite the RF's agreement with the Spanish government to establish a school for PH visiting nurses<sup>(12)</sup>. Thus, in 1931, an agreement was signed, and the RF committed to financing the construction costs of the future *Escuela de Enfermeras Visitadoras Sanitarias*, providing scholarships for graduate studies in PH nursing to train future teachers at this school<sup>(12,16,19)</sup>.

The first step of the agreement was for the RF to send Elisabeth Crowell, an RF field director and member of the IHB team, to Spain that same year, who was tasked with conducting an extensive nursing study in Spain<sup>(20)</sup>. In her report, Crowell stated that nursing education was provided by schools located in Spanish hospitals in Madrid, Santander, and Barcelona, and concluded that: admission requirements were inadequate; teaching was insufficient; courses were characterized by disorganized theoretical teaching taught by physicians; and practical experience was unsupervised<sup>(20)</sup>. She also pointed out that the lack of professionals who understand what a nursing school should be seriously undermines the professionalization of nurses<sup>(12,16,20)</sup>.

Additionally, Crowell analyzed the ENS project, identifying the need for spaces that facilitate effective practical experience and the desirability of raising the future school's admission requirements. She also emphasized the importance of providing adequate training for management and faculty and offering scholarships for studying abroad<sup>(20)</sup>. This last issue was resolved through a training course held between 1931 and 1934 in the US during the government of the Second Spanish Republic<sup>(12,16)</sup>. The two-year course prepared 14 nurses to teach at the school, and the start date was scheduled between the end of 1934 and the beginning of 1935<sup>(12,16,20)</sup>. This report was accompanied by information on the proposed future ENS, as assessed by the school's special committee. The following proposals stood out: providing a location in Madrid for clinical nursing practices and for medical, pediatric, obstetric, and primary care services, as well as surgery; preparing the necessary personnel for the school's management, teaching, and supervision with resources and scholarships abroad; and defining the admission requirements for students at the future school<sup>(8,16-20)</sup>.

Thus, a total of fourteen Spanish nurses traveled to the US on an RF scholarship to attend graduate PH nursing courses. The study program consisted of Case Western Reserve University nursing students in Ohio, US, taking courses such as Fundamental Nursing, Advanced Nursing, Principles and Methods of Nursing Education, Social Aspects of Nursing, and Public Health. They supplemented this knowledge with a several-month internship at East Harlem Nursing in New York, US, a nursing rehabilitation center. They also interned at the PH service in New York<sup>(8,12,16)</sup>.

In 1933, Gustavo Pittaluga founded the ENS of Madrid, which was affiliated with the *Escuela Nacional de Enfermeras Visitadoras* in Madrid, with classes taught by physicians. Between 1933 and 1935, the school offered a three-month theoretical and practical course that trained 126 technical professionals. Candidates only needed to be practitioners, midwives, or nurses. The course prepared students for roles related to education, providing information on how to prevent illness, collecting data about family life, and making home visits stood out<sup>(12,16)</sup>. Fifty of these trained professionals went to dispensaries and health centers, 35 went to child hygiene services, and 25 went to dispensaries and secondary rural hygiene centers. No records were found revealing the services of the remaining 16 who completed the course in 1935<sup>(12,16)</sup> (Figure 2)<sup>(21)</sup>.

Figure 2<sup>(21)</sup> shows, from left to right, Dr. Gustavo Pittaluga as the first man on the left, Mercedes Milá as the third woman standing on the left, and María de Madariaga as the fifth woman standing on the left. In the center, kneeling with her arms behind her back, is a visiting nurse. The exact date of the photograph is unknown.

Spanish nurses' work was particularly significant in this context of nursing professionalization. Their presence, visually recorded in Figure 3, reinforces the importance of these professionals as pioneers in the introduction of modern PH practices. The image symbolizes the transition from traditional religious care to the professional and scientific model, aligned with RC and RF precepts.

Figure 3 depicts a group of Spanish nurses during the Franco era. The photograph symbolizes the transition from religiously based care to the professionalization of nursing. Rather than portraying individuals, the image represents the collective changes that marked nursing in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1934, the ENS became part of the *Instituto Nacional de Sanidad* (INS), while maintaining its fundamental role of training, preparing, and educating health technicians. The Spanish Civil War of 1936 led to the physical destruction of the INS. Amid the hostilities of the war, the RF left the country, abandoning everything it had established and planned. Despite all their efforts, Dr. Pittaluga and the RF did not achieve their objective of incorporating these professionals into the *Escuela Nacional de Enfermeras Visitadoras* of Madrid. This was due, in part, to the consequences of the Civil War (1936–1939), which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people and interrupted the course<sup>(5,12,16)</sup>.

Of the 14 nurses who graduated in the US with RF funding, four were recommended to partner countries, including Montserrat Ripoll, Aurora Mas de Gaminde, Manolita Ricart, and Maria São João. These four women have held managerial and teaching positions at the National School of Nursing in Caracas, Venezuela since its founding in 1937, as well as at the RC School in Maracaibo and the Caribbean Hospital School of Nursing, also in Maracaibo, contributing to nursing development in that country<sup>(12)</sup>.

After the Civil War, remaining graduate nurses with RF scholarships were gradually incorporated into health organizations in Spain. The frustration of institutional, national, international, political, social, and personal efforts represented the beginning of the dictatorship established in Spain during this period under General Francisco Franco Bahamonde's government (1939–1975), Head of State. It was a long period of Francoist dictatorship that monopolized all state powers until his death in 1975<sup>(5,16,17)</sup>.



**Figure 2** - Gustavo Pittaluga with visiting nurses from the *Centro Secundario de Higiene Rural de Talavera de la Reina*  
 Source: Authors' family album (undated).



**Figure 3** – Mercedes Milá y Nolla and María de Madariaga y Alonso  
 Source: *Archivo Regional de La Comunidad de Madrid*<sup>(21)</sup>.

## DISCUSSION

Volunteer work caring for others was significantly systematized in the Christian era, marked by lay and perpetual religious orders' work, as well as by European society women, married or widowed, who had time for charitable actions, not always focused on physical care, as a way to do good and fund social projects. One example of this is the French *Confréries de Charité*, which gave rise to the *Compagnie des Filles de la Charité de Saint-Vincent-de-Paul*<sup>(2-4)</sup>. In their historiographical reflection, Padilha and Mancía demonstrate how religious practices directly influenced nursing development as represented by Florence Nightingale, emphasizing values such as altruism, appreciation of the care environment, and social division of labor<sup>(21)</sup>.

Queen Victoria Eugenie of Battenberg and Carmen Angolotti y Mesa promoted nursing's professional work. Through their charisma, they managed to improve the public perception of nurses and the nursing profession. This was further demonstrated during the Rif War when nurses received the highest decorations and awards, as well as unanimous recognition from Spanish society<sup>(7-22)</sup>. Recognition of the importance of this work certainly facilitated the creation of the institution's professional nursing corps<sup>(7,12)</sup>. Furthermore, the rigorous selection criteria and careful training of students, in terms of education and morals, probably contributed to the dignity of the profession<sup>(15)</sup>.

In turn, the queen followed the instructions formulated by the RC International Committee in 1927, which warned that visits to the homes of those in need could only be carried out by professional nurses<sup>(4,8,12)</sup>. This recommendation was reinforced through the RC's premise, which established that nursing care in people's homes could not, under any circumstances, be an act of charity towards the person without resources, as the objective of care was to provide assistance to residents<sup>(12,23-27)</sup>.

Visiting nurses' contribution consisted of acting as a link between hospitals and homes, accompanying hospitalized patients and preparing them for their return home. In the Spanish context, visiting nurses were seen as an innovation destined to play a fundamental role in reformist health policy development during the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>(12-19)</sup>.

This Spanish experience finds important parallels in other countries, such as Brazil, where the RF also exerted a strong influence on the training of PH nurses. Beginning in 1921, with the so-called "Parsons Mission", health visitors were recruited for emergency courses. In 1923, the *Escola de Enfermeiras do Departamento Nacional de Saúde Pública* was established. This school became a benchmark for PH nursing education, collaborating closely with the North American mission. The first nurses trained began conducting home visits, thereby establishing a link between preventive medicine and community care<sup>(14,28)</sup>.

In the Spanish context, visiting nurses and Sisters of Charity carried out joint home visits on several occasions. During the pre-professional period of nursing, nuns assisted physicians. However, to avoid interfering with other existing health professions, their functions were always subordinate to medical orders.

Therefore, their work could be questioned because they could only care for those in need out of religious sentiment. Subsequently, the visiting nurses' presence in vulnerable patients' homes led to the profession being seen as closely related to the Sisters of Charity, and their work implied devotion and closeness to religion<sup>(17)</sup>. Hence, María de Madariaga y Alonso's work is noteworthy. Her work as a nurse was a new form of public intervention for Catholic women. While it was not as closely linked to social action, it was closely linked to caring for the sick in a holistic and professional manner<sup>(9,17)</sup>.

Spanish nursing was influenced by the country's various political and economic periods, experiencing both advances and setbacks. The Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) halted many efforts to expand the profession, particularly interrupting the RF's activities. The RF aimed to create a nursing program modeled on American Nightingale nursing and was led by nurses trained for this purpose<sup>(12,16,29)</sup>.

In this context, PH visiting nurses played a fundamental role in the reformist health policy development during the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>(9,11,16)</sup>.

With the advent of the Franco dictatorship, the country's social and health progress suffered significant setbacks. The nursing profession deteriorated, becoming more auxiliary and subordinate. During this period, nursing development was confined almost exclusively to hospital care, accentuating its isolation and delaying the professionalization process<sup>(5,12)</sup>.

### Study limitations

One limitation of this study was the limited six-month stay in Spain, which made accessing documents archived in various libraries difficult. Consequently, a more comprehensive overview of the topic could not be obtained, nor could an in-depth analysis of all relevant documents be conducted. This prevented an understanding of the professionalization of PH nursing in this specific country from being achieved. Additionally, some crucial information may have been unavailable or unattainable within this short period.

Future studies would benefit from a longer research period or alternative access to documents, such as collaborations with local institutions or partnerships with established researchers in the field. These measures would overcome time constraints and ensure a more comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the subject in question.

### Contributions to the history of nursing, health, and education

This study provides an opportunity to understand the historical, social, and political contexts fundamental to the professionalization of PH nursing in a specific European country. This analysis provides insight into how the profession has evolved over time, enabling us to recognize the nuances of its social structure. This deeper understanding allows for comparisons with other contexts and countries, thereby enriching the global perspective of PH nursing. It makes it possible to identify similarities and differences between different realities, contributing to the profession's international evolution.

Thus, by studying PH nursing origins and development, we recapture the past and understand how the profession has evolved and adapted over the years. This provides a solid foundation for continued progress in the field of PH.

### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Through this study, we gained an understanding of the historical, social, and political contexts that were fundamental to the professionalization of PH nursing in Spain between 1923 and 1936. By analyzing the initial training programs for visiting nurses during this period, we observed how the profession gradually developed, revealing the nuances of its social organization. This historical understanding paves the way for comparisons with other contexts and countries, thereby enriching the global perspective of PH nursing. Identifying similarities and differences between different contexts contributes to the profession's evolution on an international scale.

Therefore, by studying the origins and evolution of PH nursing in Spain, we can understand how the profession has adapted and developed over time, offering a solid basis for its continued strengthening and appreciation in the field of PH.

### REFERENCES

1. Weindling P. As origens da participação da América Latina na organização de saúde da Liga das Nações, 1920 a 1940. *Hist Cienc Saude Manguinhos*. 2006;13(3):555-70. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-59702006000300002>.
2. Cunha CMSLM, Henriques MAP, Costa ACJS. Public health nursing: regulation and public health policies. *Rev Bras Enferm*. 2020;73(6):e20190550. <http://doi.org/10.1590/0034-7167-2019-0550>.
3. Santos TCF, Peres MAA, Almeida Filho AJ, Aperibense PGG, Alcántara EL. Florence Nightingale's legacy: a reflection from Pierre Bourdieu's perspective. *Texto Contexto Enferm*. 2022;31:e20210200. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1980-265X-TCE-2021-0200>.
4. Gómez-Cantarino S, Dios-Aguado M, Peñalver AC, Dominguez-Isabel P, Montejano JR, Espina-Jerez B. Regulación de la enfermería española: incorporación a la profesión sanitaria (1850-1950). *Esc Anna Nery*. 2020;24(4):e20200053. <https://doi.org/10.1590/2177-9465-EAN-2020-0053>.
5. Dios-Aguado M, Gómez-Cantarino S, Domínguez-Isabel P, Chaves MCRF, Queirós PJP. Enfermería durante la guerra civil española y su posguerra (1936-1949): olvido e inhabilitación. *Rev Enferm Referencia*. 2020;5(2):e20019. <https://doi.org/10.12707/RV20019>.

6. Galiana-Sánchez ME. Historia de la enfermería en salud pública en España y el contexto internacional. *Eur J Nurs Hist Ethics*. 2019;1:124-143. <https://doi.org/10.25974/enhe2019-12es>.
7. Dios-Aguado M, Peters AA, Silva DM, Carvalho MOF, Queirós PJP, Cotto-Andino M. Carmen Angolotti y Mesa, compromisso com a pessoa em sofrimento. *Hist Enferm Rev Eletr*. 2023;14:e11. <https://doi.org/10.51234/here.2023.v14.e11>
8. Clemente JC. La escuela universitaria de enfermeras de Madrid: historia de una iniciativa humanitaria de la Cruz Roja Española, 1918-1997. Madrid: Fundamentos Editorial; 1999.
9. German-Bes C, Santos Y, Espejo M. Las primeras enfermeras laicas españolas: Aurora Mas y los orígenes de una profesión en el siglo XX. Zaragoza: Universidad de Zaragoza; 2020.
10. Mas Espejo M. Las damas enfermeras de la Cruz Roja española durante el reinado de Alfonso XIII. Madrid: Editorial Dykinson; 2018.
11. Bernabeu-Mestre J, Gascón Pérez MA. El papel de la enfermería en el desarrollo de la salud pública española (1923-1935) la visitadora sanitaria. *Dynamis*. 1995 [cited 2021 Dec 17];15:151-176. Available from: <https://raco.cat/index.php/Dynamis/article/view/108730/149974>.
12. Carlos DJD, Muñoz MCG, Padilha MI. The history of Spanish nursing (1953–1980): introductory notes. *Texto Contexto Enferm*. 2016;25(2):e1390015. <https://doi.org/10.1590/0104-07072016001390015>.
13. Dios-Aguado M, Peters AA, Peres MAA, Gómez-Cantarino S. Enfermera visitadora modelo vanguardista de cuidados de salud en España. *Esc Anna Nery*. 2023;27:e20220293. <https://doi.org/10.1590/2177-9465-EAN-2022-0293es>.
14. Farley J. To cast out disease: a history of the international health division of the Rockefeller Foundation (1913–1951). New York: Oxford University Press; 2004.
15. Padilha MI, Bellaguarda MLR, Nelson S, Maia ARC, Costa R. The use of sources in historical research. *Texto Contexto Enferm*. 2017;26(4):e2760017. <https://doi.org/10.1590/0104-07072017002760017>.
16. Olmsted K. Curso internacional para enfermeras visitadoras. Paris: Herbert Clark; 1923.
17. Liga de Asociaciones de la Cruz Roja. La enfermera-visitadora pro-higiene pública. Madrid: Asamblea Central de Señoras de la Cruz Roja Española; 1923.
18. Barros JDA. Fontes históricas: revisitando alguns aspectos primordiais para a pesquisa histórica. *Mouseion*. 2012;(12):129-59. <https://doi.org/10.18316/332>.
19. Dios-Aguado M, Peters AA, Peres MAA, Gómez-Cantarino S. The public health nurse cutting-edge care model in Spain. *Esc Anna Nery*. 2023;27:e20220293. <https://doi.org/10.1590/2177-9465-EAN-2022-0293en>.
20. Martin FH. Historia de la enfermera en España: desde la antigüedad hasta nuestros días. Madrid: Síntesis; 1996.
21. Padilha MICS, Mancia JR. Florence Nightingale e as irmãs de caridade: revisitando a história. *Rev Bras Enferm*. 2005;58(6):723–6. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0034-71672005000600018>.
22. Barona JL, Bernabeu Mestre J. La salud y el Estado: el movimiento sanitario internacional y la administración española (1851-1945). València: Universidad de Valencia; 2008
23. López M, Mirón-González R, Castro M-J, Jiménez J-M. Training of volunteer nurses during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939): a historical study. *PLoS One*. 2021;16(12):e0261787. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0261787>.
24. Cruz Roja Española. Reglamento del Hospital Central y Escuela de Enfermeras. Madrid: CRE; 1916.
25. Cruz Roja Española. Creación del Cuerpo de Enfermeros Profesionales. Madrid: CRE; años 1924.
26. Cruz Roja Española. Creación del Cuerpo de Enfermeros Profesionales. Madrid: CRE; años 1925.
27. Cruz Roja Española. Creación del Cuerpo de Enfermeros Profesionales. Madrid: CRE; años 1927.
28. Ayres LFA, Amorim WM, Piva TCC, Porto FR. As estratégias de luta simbólica para a formação da enfermeira visitadora no início do século XX. *Hist Ciênc Saúde Manguinhos*. 2012;19(3):861–82. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-59702012000300005>.
29. Nelson S, Galbany-Estragués P, Gallego-Caminero G. The nurses no-one remembers: looking for Spanish nurses in accounts of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). *Nurs Hist Rev*. 2020;28(1):63-92. <https://doi.org/10.1891/1062-8061.28.63>.

**Submission:** 23/07/2025  
**Reformulation:** 25/08/2025  
**Approval:** 29/08/2025

**Editor-in-Chief:** Deybson Borba de Almeida  
**Associate Editor:** Deybson Borba de Almeida

**Ad hoc reviewers:**  
Maria Itayra Padilha  
Rodrigo Nogueira da Silva

#### AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

AAP, MDA, MSGC - Study conception of the study  
AAP, MDA, MSGC - Data collection  
AAP, MDA, TCFS, CPGS - Data analysis  
AAP, MDA, RSM - Manuscript writing  
AAP, MDA, TCFS, CPGS, RSM, MSGC - Critical revision for important intellectual content

#### FUNDING AGENCIES

Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES), through the Programa de Pós-Graduação em Enfermagem da Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) - Brasil.