

## Artículo de reflexión

## Nursing research in Latin America: priorities and possible solutions to move it forward

### *Investigación en enfermería en América Latina: prioridades y posibles soluciones para su impulso*

Giselly Matagira Rondón<sup>RN, MSc. 1</sup> [✉ ORCID](#), Maite Catalina Agudelo Cifuentes<sup>PhD. 1</sup> [✉ ORCID](#), Isabelle Toupin<sup>RN, PhD. 2</sup> [✉ ORCID](#), Dave A. Bergeron<sup>RN, PhD. 2</sup> [✉ ORCID](#)

<sup>1</sup> Facultad de Enfermería, Universidad CES, Medellín, Colombia. Research Group: Cuidado en Enfermería CES.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Health Sciences, Université du Québec à Rimouski, Canadá. Research Group: Collectif de recherche sur la santé en région (CoRSeR).

**Fecha correspondencia:**

Recibido: 14 de abril de 2022.

Aceptado: 06 de mayo de 2022.

**Forma de citar:**

Matagira-Rondón G, Agudelo-Cifuentes MC, Toupin I, Bergeron DA. Nursing research in Latin America: priorities and possible solutions to move it forward. Rev CES Enf [Internet]; 3(1): 46-54. Disponible en: <https://dx.doi.org/10.21615/cesenferm.6691>

[Open access](#)

[Licencia creative commons](#)

[Ética de publicaciones](#)

[Revisión por pares](#)

[Gestión por Open Journal System](#)

DOI: 10.21615/cesenferm.6691

ISSNe 2745-049X

**[Publica con nosotros](#)**

### Abstract

Nursing research has allowed for the evolution of the discipline in areas such as the study of the ontology of care, the organization of health services, the organization of schools and faculties, nursing education, and nursing interventions and practices. Although nursing research has been growing in Latin America, it does not compare with the research being conducted in other health disciplines, and the need for nursing research in the region is still great. This article is the result of a reflection on nursing research in Latin America and aims to identify some of the research priorities in this region and possible solutions. The main priorities for nursing research are related to nursing interventions and innovations. There is also a need for more research in partnership with vulnerable groups and further research on public policy needs, interprofessional collaboration and practice, and nursing human resource planning. To address these priorities, it will be necessary to facilitate the involvement of community stakeholders and clinical practice nurses as well as the development of collaborations between researchers from different Latin American countries. Considering the complexity and diversity of the contexts in which nurses in Latin America work, it will also be necessary to develop nursing theories specific to regional contexts. By implementing some of the solutions

proposed in this article, it may be possible for nursing research to further develop its potential to address many health challenges in Latin America.

**Keywords:** nursing research; latin america; research priorities; global health; universal health care.

## Resumen

La investigación en enfermería ha permitido la evolución de la disciplina en áreas como el estudio de la ontología del cuidado, la organización de los servicios de salud, la organización de escuelas o facultades, la formación de enfermeras e intervenciones y las prácticas de enfermería. Aunque la investigación en enfermería ha ido creciendo en América Latina, no se compara con la investigación que se realiza en otras disciplinas de la salud en la región, y la necesidad de investigación en la región sigue siendo grande. Este artículo es el resultado de una reflexión sobre la investigación en enfermería en América Latina y tiene como objetivo identificar algunas prioridades de investigación en esta región y posibles soluciones. Las principales prioridades de la investigación en enfermería están relacionadas con las intervenciones e innovaciones de enfermería. También es necesario realizar más investigaciones en colaboración con grupos vulnerables y profundizar en las necesidades de las políticas públicas, la colaboración y la práctica interprofesional y la planificación de los recursos humanos en enfermería. Para abordar estas prioridades, es necesario facilitar la participación de las partes interesadas de las comunidades y de las enfermeras en la práctica clínica, así como el desarrollo de la colaboración entre investigadores de diferentes países de América Latina. Teniendo en cuenta la complejidad y la diversidad de los contextos en los que trabajan las enfermeras en Latinoamérica, también es necesario desarrollar teorías de enfermería específicas para el contexto regional. Mediante la aplicación de algunas de las soluciones propuestas en este artículo, es posible que la investigación en enfermería desarrolle aún más su potencial para hacer frente a muchos desafíos relacionados con la salud en la región.

**Palabras clave:** investigación en enfermería; américa latina; prioridades en investigación; salud global; atención de salud universal.

## Introduction

Nurses around the world interact in complex health systems <sup>(1)</sup>, where they undertake multiple interventions to care for and improve the health of individuals, families, and communities <sup>(2)</sup>. By developing knowledge regarding individual interventions, community action, and health care analysis, and by developing and evaluating health care interventions and policies, nursing research has tremendous potential to advance the global health agenda and help nurses in their efforts to improve the health of communities <sup>(3)</sup>.

Enero – junio de 2022.

Despite some delays in comparison with other regions around the globe <sup>(4)</sup>, nursing research in Latin America has the potential to address several global health challenges in the region <sup>(5)</sup>, such as advancing universal access to health care and universal health coverage <sup>(6)</sup> as well as fostering the development of culturally appropriate interventions for groups in vulnerable situations <sup>(7)</sup>. As the result of a reflection on nursing research in Latin America, this article aims to identify some of the research priorities in the region and possible solutions. In the absence of a regional agenda for nursing research <sup>(8)</sup>, the identification of priorities and potential solutions to address them is a first step in making nursing research more effective in improving health for all in Latin America.

## **A brief overview of the evolution of nursing research**

The first attempts to define nursing were made in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century by Florence Nightingale, when nursing was focused on optimizing environments to promote healing and optimal health <sup>(9)</sup>. Subsequent efforts were made by theorists in the mid-1950s to differentiate nursing from other health science disciplines and to develop nursing theories <sup>(9)</sup>. The definition of nursing as a discipline and practice profession continues to evolve. For example, Fawcett <sup>(10)</sup> referred to nursology to define nursing as the knowledge of why, when, where, and how nurses collaborate with other human beings as they experience wellness, illness, and disease within their environments. Based on a recent review of the literature, Smith <sup>(11)</sup> proposed four themes that constitute the essence of nursing: care, human integrity, health/healing/wellness, and the human-environment-health relationship. According to Risjord <sup>(12)</sup>, the advancement of nursing science will be achieved by maintaining its boundaries while remaining connected to the knowledge of other disciplines.

Since the first doctoral program in nursing was created in the United States in 1923, and with the beginning of funding in the 1930s, nursing research has enabled the evolution of nursing in many areas, including the study of the ontology of care, the organization of health services, the organization of schools and faculties, the training of nurses, and nursing interventions and practices <sup>(13)</sup>.

## **Status of nursing research in Latin America**

In Latin America, nursing research has advanced more slowly, evidenced by the historical lag in the opening of the first doctoral programs in the 1980s in Brazil <sup>(4)</sup>. However, much effort has been invested over the last decades to train more nurse researchers <sup>(5, 14)</sup> and develop nursing research in Latin America <sup>(14)</sup>, which has enabled significant progress in adapting to the needs of disciplinary knowledge, current scientific and technological developments, market requirements, and institutional demands <sup>(15)</sup>. However, the needs in nursing research remain great in Latin America <sup>(16)</sup>, and research based on its historical, social, and cultural context and on population needs must be carried out to reduce the gap between theory and practice and to promote knowledge transfer to nursing practice <sup>(17)</sup>.

Enero – junio de 2022.

In this sense, although nursing research has, for the most part, been increasing in Latin America, mainly in the last decade, it does not compare with research conducted in other health disciplines in the region. In addition, the increase in nursing research has not been homogeneous in the region; rather, it has mainly been concentrated in a few countries, such as Brazil and Mexico <sup>(16, 18)</sup>. In addition, scientific production, despite some progress, remains rather low <sup>(19)</sup>, and its international visibility is limited <sup>(16)</sup>. Collaboration between nurse researchers from different countries within the region is also rare <sup>(18)</sup>.

The main areas of nursing research in Latin America have been patients' experiences or knowledge, patient group characteristics, and factors related to chronic diseases <sup>(18)</sup>. In comparison, in North America and the English-speaking countries, nursing research focuses more on topics such as the organization of the profession, functions, service management, and training <sup>(20)</sup>. In the 21st century, nursing research must account for nurses' knowledge and the impact of nursing interventions, innovative technologies, and social innovations in disease prevention and in patient care <sup>(20)</sup>.

Clinical nurses have little involvement in research in Latin America <sup>(18)</sup>. Significant inequalities also continue to exist among countries regarding the ability of nurses to conduct research and integrate research knowledge into practice <sup>(21, 22)</sup>.

## **Nursing research priorities in Latin America**

More nursing research related to nursing interventions and innovations is needed in Latin America to improve universal access to health care <sup>(5, 16, 21, 23)</sup> and universal health coverage <sup>(16)</sup>. Specifically, research on community nursing, primary health care, epidemiological surveillance strategies <sup>(21)</sup>, public health nursing <sup>(6)</sup>, and advanced nursing practice <sup>(23)</sup> are relevant for improving universal access to health care in the region.

Likewise, it will also be important to conduct more nursing research in Latin America in partnership with groups in vulnerable situations or with limited access to basic health services in order to better understand their needs and perspectives and to co-develop, implement, and evaluate nursing interventions to improve universal access to health care <sup>(23, 24)</sup>. There is also a need for nurse researchers to evaluate the adaptation and development of culturally appropriate interventions <sup>(7)</sup>. In addition, more nursing research on public policy needs to be conducted to influence the decision-making of policymakers <sup>(5, 6, 16)</sup> in favor of greater universal health coverage. Finally, there is also a need for more research on interprofessional collaboration and practice and their impact on individual, family, and community health <sup>(25)</sup> as well as on nursing human resource planning, particularly related to the recruitment, hiring, retention, migration, and distribution of nurses <sup>(6, 25)</sup>, in order to meet the needs of vulnerable populations and those in areas with scarce health care resources <sup>(25)</sup>.

## How to respond to identified nursing research priorities

The development of integrated research teams not only consisting of researchers, educators, administrators, and nurses working in clinical practice <sup>(26)</sup> but also incorporating community stakeholders <sup>(24)</sup> is a priority for nursing research in Latin America. Through the contributions of diverse perspectives, these integrated research teams could better identify local needs <sup>(24, 27)</sup> and systemic dysfunctions in health systems, leading to the development, implementation, and evaluation of contextualized solutions <sup>(27)</sup>. In addition, the formation of these research teams could encourage clinical practice nurses to become more engaged in the research process, increase the production of scientific nursing literature relevant to clinical practice, and facilitate the knowledge transfer process <sup>(26)</sup>.

It is also important in both academic and clinical settings to cultivate academic reflection, foster links between research and practice, and encourage nurses to contribute to the development, implementation, and evaluation of health care innovations <sup>(5, 24, 25)</sup>. To support the optimal development of nursing research in Latin America, it will also be necessary to protect time for nurses involved in nursing education to develop and conduct research projects and for nurses in clinical practice to also collaborate on research projects <sup>(26)</sup>.

The development of research collaborations among researchers from different Latin American countries would also facilitate the advancement of nursing research and nursing care, thereby better addressing common health care needs <sup>(8, 18)</sup>. Intra- and inter-professional partnerships would enhance the academic contributions of nursing and have an additional impact on health systems <sup>(18)</sup>.

Research begins with questions posed by nurses, and it is important to develop theories to solve problems of practice <sup>(9)</sup>. Considering the increasing diversity and complexity of the situations and environments in which nurses work <sup>(1, 28)</sup>, the development of nursing theories <sup>(28)</sup> specific to the Latin American context is essential. Recognizing the need to understand complexity in different ways in nursing <sup>(29)</sup> and the fact that nursing theory can be developed through both inductive and deductive methods <sup>(30)</sup>, different approaches could be used to contribute to the development of nursing theory in Latin America, including realist evaluation <sup>(31)</sup>.

The development of theories in nursing is complementary to evidence-based practice; evidence-based practice addresses "if it works," whereas theories in nursing address "how it works" <sup>(32)</sup>. Theories also allow for the recognition of relationships between phenomena that may otherwise seem unconnected <sup>(33)</sup>.

A method that advocates for the use of multiple data collection methods <sup>(34)</sup>, realist evaluation is a theory-driven approach that allows for a more in-depth understanding of an intervention or phenomenon by identifying different patterns <sup>(35, 36)</sup>. It is an approach that is rooted in local knowledge <sup>(37)</sup>, process-oriented <sup>(37, 38)</sup>, and able to link different knowledge systems

together <sup>(37)</sup>, and it could be used more often in contexts such as Latin America <sup>(39)</sup> to address nursing research priorities.

## Conclusion

Latin America has made great advances in nursing research and in the training of nursing professionals on research competencies. Despite this, the region still faces great challenges to the generation of new knowledge to respond to contextual problems. One of the main challenges is the integration of research into work practice, signifying that working conditions should include time dedicated to research and innovation activities in the area. Complementary to the above, it is necessary to strengthen alliances that favor research between different countries in the region and beyond.

Nursing research should contribute to the closing of gaps between theory and practice and be a bridge for evidence-based practice, where the context, the expertise of professionals, and the needs of patients and communities are considered. It is essential to advance research from a historical, cultural, and Latin American perspective, integrating different methodological designs that allow for reflection on, interaction with, and understanding of current needs and facilitate the implementation of solutions and their subsequent evaluation in order to understand what works, for whom, and when. Applying these principles would help nursing research in Latin America reach its full potential and, thus, promote better health for all in the region.

## Funding

This article results from the Colombia-Université du Québec (COLUQ) event, a meeting between Colombian university researchers and researchers from the Université du Québec network, which was funded by Université du Québec and allowed for the development of a scientific collaboration between Universidad CES and Université du Québec à Rimouski.

## Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

## Acknowledgment

We would like to sincerely thank Ms. Lisa Starr for linguistic revision.

## References

1. Thompson DR, Clark AM. The complexity conundrum: Nursing interventions for complex health problems. *Contemp Nurse*. 2012;40(2):277–80.
2. Cabal VE, Guarnizo M. Enfermería como disciplina. *Rev Colomb Enferm*. 2011;6:73–81.
3. Jairath N. Global health: The role of nursing research. *Nurs Res*. 2007;56(6):367–8.

Enero – junio de 2022.

4. Daza L, Ladinob L. Enfermería: ¿Ciencia normal o ciencia revolucionaria? *Enferm Univ.* 2018;15(2):184.
5. Mendes IAC, Ventura CAA, Silva ÍR, Gir E, de Almeida EWS, Queiroz AAFLN, et al. Alignment and contribution of nursing doctoral programs to achieve the sustainable development goals. *Hum Resour Health.* 2020;18(1):1–9.
6. Hughes TL, George M, Shah R, Dias BM, Dohrn JE, De Bortoli Cassiani SH. Nursing engagement in research priorities focused on health systems and services in Latin America countries. *Hum Resour Health.* 2022;20(1):1–9.
7. Ferrer L, Sutherland M. Salud global, nuevos desafíos para investigación en enfermería. *Cienc Enferm.* 2017;23(1):7–10.
8. Palucci Marziale MH. Nursing research priorities in light of the sustainable development goals: The 2030 agenda. *Aquichan.* 2019;19(2).
9. Meleis AI. *Theoretical nursing: Development and progress.* 5th ed. Philadelphia: Lippincott William & Wilkins, Wolters Kluwer; 2012.
10. Fawcett J. Thoughts about nursing science and nursing sciencing revisited. *Nurs Sci Q.* 2020;33(1):97–9.
11. Smith MC. Regenerating nursing's disciplinary perspective. *ANS Adv Nurs Sci.* 2019;42(1):3–16.
12. Risjord M. *Nursing knowledge: Science, practice, and philosophy.* Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons; 2011.
13. Nieswiadomy RM, Bailey C. *Foundations of nursing research.* 7th ed. Hoboken: Pearson; 2018.
14. Mendoza-Parra S, Paravic-Klijn T, Muñoz-Muñoz AM, Barriga OA, Jiménez-Contreras E. Visibility of Latin American nursing research (1959–2005). *J Nurs Scholarsh.* 2009;41(1):54–63.
15. Yañez Álvarez D. Enfermería en América Latina: una mirada al horizonte. *Av Enferm.* 2015;33(2):295.
16. Parmar J, House J, Cassiani S, Reveiz L. Health literature authored by nurses within the LAC region: a cross-sectional study. *Rev Panam Salud Pública.* 2015;37:409–14.

17. Cerón Mackay MC. Desafíos para el desarrollo y fortalecimiento de la investigación en enfermería. *Cienc Enferm*. 2016;22(3):7–9.
18. Iribarren S, Stonbraker S, Larsen B, Santos I, Faria R, Goes FS, et al. Clinical nursing and midwifery research in Latin American and Caribbean countries: A scoping review. *Int J Nurs Pract*. 2018;24(2):e12623.
19. Aguirre Raya D. La investigación en enfermería en América Latina 2000–2010. *Rev Habanera Cienc Méd*. 2011 Sep;10(3):396–409.
20. Whetsell MV. Desafíos de la investigación en enfermería. *Investig Enferm Imagen Desarro*. 2016;18(1):9–11.
21. Garcia AB, Cassiani SHDB, Reveiz L. A systematic review of nursing research priorities on health system and services in the Americas. *Rev Panam Salud Pública*. 2015;37:162–71.
22. Ramírez Sánchez SC, Pérez Solís OM, Lozano Rangel O. Perspectiva de la investigación en enfermería: el caso México. *Rev Enferm*. 2019;(13):8.
23. Oldenburger D, De Bortoli Cassiani SH, Bryant-Lukosius D, Valaitis RK, Baumann A, Pulcini J, et al. Implementation strategy for advanced practice nursing in primary health care in Latin America and the Caribbean. *Rev Panam Salud Pública*. 2017;41:e40.
24. Joseph PV, McCauley L, Richmond TS. PhD programs and the advancement of nursing science. *J Prof Nurs*. 2021;37(1):195–200.
25. Cassiani SHDB, Bassalobre-Garcia A, Reveiz L. Universal access to health and universal health coverage: Identification of nursing research priorities in Latin America. *Rev Lat Am Enfermagem*. 2015;23:1195–208.
26. DeBruyn RR, Ochoa-Marín SC, Semenic S. Barriers and facilitators to evidence-based nursing in Colombia: Perspectives of nurse educators, nurse researchers and graduate students. *Invest Educ Enferm*. 2014;32(1):9–21.
27. García-Cerde R, Becerril-Montekio V, Langlois É, Reveiz L, Alcalde-Rabanal J, Torres-Pereda P. Embedded implementation research determinants in Latin American health systems. *Rev Saúde Pública*. 2021;55:16.
28. Im EO. Theory development process of situation-specific theories. *ANS Adv Nurs Sci*. 2021;44(1):E32–47.



29. Bouchard Cordier S. L'appropriation par certaines théoriciennes de la discipline infirmière du savoir sur les systèmes complexes : un enjeu disciplinaire méconnu. *Rech Soins Infirm.* 2021;144(1):22–33.
30. Dallaire C, Lambert J, Kamel FF. La proposition de structuration du savoir infirmier selon Fawcett : filiations et limites. *Rech Soins Infirm.* 2021;144(1):34–43.
31. Dupin CM. Évaluation réaliste pour la recherche en implémentation. *Soins.* 2017;62(814):52.
32. Smith MC, Chinn PL, Nicoll LH. Knowledge for nursing practice: Beyond evidence alone. *Res Theory Nurs Pract.* 2021;35(1):7–23.
33. Risjord M. Middle-range theories as models: New criteria for analysis and evaluation. *Nurs Philos.* 2019;20(1):e12225.
34. Pawson R, Manzano-Santaella A. A realist diagnostic workshop. *Evaluation.* 2012;18(2):176–91.
35. Greenhalgh T, Pawson R, Wong G, Westhorp G, Greenhalgh J, Manzano A, et al. “Theory” in realist evaluation. The RAMESSES II Project. [Internet]. Oxford; 2017. Available from: [www.ramesesproject.org](http://www.ramesesproject.org)
36. Pawson R, Tilley N. *Realistic evaluation.* London: Sage; 1997.
37. Bergeron DA, Tremblay MC, Dogba MJ, Martin D, McGavock J. The use of realist approaches for health research in Indigenous communities. *AlterNative.* 2021;17(1):106–10.
38. Maxwell JA. *A realist approach for qualitative research.* New York: Sage; 2012.
39. Parra JD. Introducción a la evaluación realista y sus métodos: ¿Qué funciona, para quién, en qué aspectos, hasta qué punto, en qué contexto y cómo? *Economía & Región.* 2017;11(2):11–44.