



## THE PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY OF MILITARY NURSING: AN INTEGRATIVE REVIEW

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** to analyze the professional identity of military nursing comprised of worldwide scientific literature. **Method:** an integrative literature review of publications from 2010 to 2021 in the Medical Literature and Retrieval System Online, Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature, Web of Science, Embase, and Scopus indexing databases. The PICO strategy was applied to establish the research question “How has Military Nursing been described in published national and international articles?” and the reference manager Rayyan QCRI – (Qatar Computing Research Institute) for the selection of publications, which resulted in four articles submitted to content analysis, according to Bardin. **Results:** military nursing had its professional identity described by the themes: skills in military nursing, roles of military nurses, and gender relations. **Conclusion:** the professional identity of military nursing is still little discussed in the literature, but there is an effort to point out the empowerment of these nurses, as well as the strong subordination to the military rule and the medical professional. Female soldiers are under greater struggle, considering that they are a minority, with no possibilities to upgrade in the military career like those of the male gender, and due to the type of organization to which they belong.

**Keywords:** Nursing. Military Nursing. Social Identity. Military Personnel.

### INTRODUCTION

Over the centuries, war scenarios have enabled people motivated by nationalist speech to participate in battles, leaving the comfort of their homes to enter unknown ground<sup>(1)</sup>. Despite the pain and suffering related to its repercussions, the war allowed a different glimpse at women, as for the first time they broke the *locus* of a household to the *locus* of caring for war wounded as nurses<sup>(2)</sup>. With this, a history of breaking social patterns related to gender begins, towards a concept beyond the traditional feminine - that the woman can be in places previously taken only by men<sup>(3)</sup>.

The female gender and the history of nursing intertwined in the military context, leading to a social (re)construction of the image of being a woman and being a nurse<sup>(4)</sup>. Therefore, nursing, which was formerly performed by nuns, prostitutes, or social outcasts, as a way of charity or punishment, and

as an empirical practice, with the war, accepted a new identity - that of a profession of care<sup>(5)</sup>.

To understand this identity makeover whose professional history began in the war scenario, first one must discuss what identity is, problematizing it for critical thinking of the association of the theoretical meaning with that of professional reality. The theoretical-sociological meaning of identity is the subject's relationship with oneself and with the other in the world as a dynamic and historically socially constructed process, which differentiates and, at the same time, brings together similar groups<sup>(6)</sup>. The philosophical meaning of identity is that it is, at the same time, permanent and temporary, individual, and collective, subjective, and objective, biographical, and structural, resulting from the various socialization processes that, together, build individuals and describe institutions. Besides the distinction of meanings, identity also differs in terms of types: gender, social, cultural, linguistic, national, corporate,

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professional, etc<sup>(7)</sup>. Professional identity, the subject of this study, is defined by socially recognized characteristics so that there is mutual acknowledgment between individuals in the work field<sup>(8)</sup>.

Professional identity is a nonstop construction that incorporates the individual into social relationships through the groups with which one relates. The resulting relational process, permeated by moments of conflict that make the identity be questioned, allows the “self” a process of identity mis/construction<sup>(9)</sup>. In this sense, its composition by aptitudes, attributions, characteristics, competencies, and abilities fosters a specificity of recognition to the individuals who own it, being constantly changeable in the measure of their insertions and professional relationships in the same class or between different classes. Finally, research on professional identity brings relevance to the practice and social representativeness of a group/class, since it outlines the description of a profile that will grant notoriety to the area of activity and prominence in society<sup>(10)</sup>.

The construction of the professional identity of nursing, started in the interwar period, given its social identification as a profession<sup>(10)</sup>. From the memory of our professional origins, important figures contributed to the profession's identity, as well as to the history of military nursing, such as Florence Nightingale, Mary Seacole, Anna Justina Ferreira Nery, and the Brazilian Expeditionary Force's nurses (FEB). From the scene of the Crimean War, the pioneer of modern nursing – Florence Nightingale – contributed to the creation of the first School of Nursing in the world, which disseminated research, theory, and nursing practice with systematized knowledge<sup>(11)</sup>. The Jamaican Mary Seacole was the first black nurse to volunteer herself as support to the Crimean War, and Anna Justina Ferreira Nery was the first Brazilian nurse, to be close to her children in the war in Paraguay, volunteered to take care of the soldiers<sup>(12)</sup>. The Brazilian Expeditionary Force's nurses (FEB) who voluntarily fought in the Second World War (1943-1945) enabled the continuity of the history of nursing to be written on the battlefields<sup>(13)</sup>.

Therefore, the professional identity of military nursing involves knowledge, skills, and

attitudes characteristic to the military aspect, distinguishing it from other areas of nursing, which makes it a peculiar area for scientific investigation of its identity. Despite this investigative demand for knowledge that supports the professional practice and establishes a professional identity, there are few publications and current discussions about military nursing and its identity - knowing it is to return to our professional origins to understand and question them with the current military practice, surrounded by matters concerning gender relations, leadership, and competences.

To mitigate this lack, we sought to conduct this study to identify and understand what knowledge exists in the field of military nursing about professional identity, starting from the following guiding question: how has Military nursing been described in published national and international articles?

Thus, this study aims to analyze the professional identity of military nursing comprised in worldwide scientific literature.

## METHOD

This is an integrative literature review, based on bibliographical research of scientific articles on the subject. The integrative review gathers data from the theoretical and empirical literature, as well as studies with different methodological approaches (quantitative and qualitative). It allows the construction of a broad analysis of the literature for discussions on research methods and results, in addition to the synthesis of multiple studies and discussions about a specific area of knowledge<sup>(14)</sup>.

The integrative literature review proposes the establishment of well-defined criteria for data collection, analysis, and presentation of results, from the beginning of the study, and a research protocol previously elaborated and validated. For that, seven steps were adopted: 1) selection of the research question; 2) definition of inclusion and exclusion criteria for studies; 3) sample selection after double-blind analysis by the reference manager Rayyan QCRI – (Qatar Computing Research Institute)<sup>(15)</sup>; 4) representation of selected studies in spreadsheet format for inclusion/exclusion of full articles; 5) critical analysis of the findings, identifying

variances and conflicts; 6) interpretation of the results and 7) clear description of the findings in the data extraction instrument<sup>(16)</sup>.

To elaborate the research question, the PICO strategy acronym for *population* (nurses) *phenomena of interest* (studies in the nursing field related to military nursing) and *context* (national and international war scenario)<sup>(17)</sup> was used. This enables it to identify keywords that help locate relevant primary studies in the databases.

The identification and selection strategy of the studies was the search for publications indexed in the Medical Literature and Retrieval System Online (MEDLINE), Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), Web of Science, Embase and Scopus databases, performed from August to

November 2021, using the search strategies shown in Chart 1 in the university libraries of the Universidade Federal de São Paulo and the Escola Paulista de Enfermagem (BU/USP/UNIFESP).

The following inclusion criteria were adopted for the selection of articles: all categories of experimental, quasi-experimental, observational, and cohort studies, as well as all qualitative studies (including, but not limited to, phenomenological studies, grounded theory, historical, ethnography, descriptive research); full-text articles available online; published in Portuguese, English or Spanish from 2010 to 2021, comprising the descriptors in the table below in their titles and/or abstracts:

**Table 1.** Description of the search strategies. São Paulo, 2021.

| Database       | Search strategy   |
|----------------|---|
| MEDLINE/PubMed | Military Nursing OR Military Nursing OR Military Nursings AND Social Identification OR Social Identity OR Social Identity OR Social Identities OR Social Identifications OR Group Identification OR Group Identifications Military Nursing [Mesh] OR Military Nursing OR Military Nursings AND Identity OR Identification |
| CINAHL         | MH Military Nursing OR Military Nursing OR Military Nursings AND MH Professional Identity OR Social Identity OR Professional Identity OR Social Identification OR Professional Identification   |
| Web of Science | Military Nursing OR Military Nursings AND Identity OR Identification  |
| Embase         | military nursing AND identity<br>Military Nursing OR Military Nursings AND Identity OR Identification   |
| Scopus         | Military Nursing OR Military Nursings AND Identity OR Identification  |

**Source:** Authors.

The resource used in the research was the expression “exact term”, associated with specific descriptors. Exclusion criteria for articles were full text unavailable for free, abstracts published in conference proceedings, reflective articles, reviews, experience reports, dissertations, theses, books, and biographies.

From the material found (400 articles), after double-blind analysis, 376 articles were chosen for title and abstract analysis, of which 91 were eligible for reading the abstract. After this stage, 12 articles were selected for full reading, in which 04 articles corresponded to the objective proposed by this study.

For the organization, data tabulation, and subsequent analysis of thematic content, the researchers created a data extraction protocol, with title, review objective, review research

question, population, phenomenon of interest, context, types of evidence source, citation details (title, author(s), year of publication, journal, volume, issue, page), language and country of origin, purpose of study, methodology, participants (details: age, gender, number of participants), methodologies used (interview, instruments, tests, simulation, etc.), specific details of the methodology (main categories, citation of the ethics committee, citation of data saturation), result/discussion (if it suggests improvements, study significance, what are the innovations), main conclusions, additional comments, clarity, and pertinence on the subject and limitations and flaws of the article.

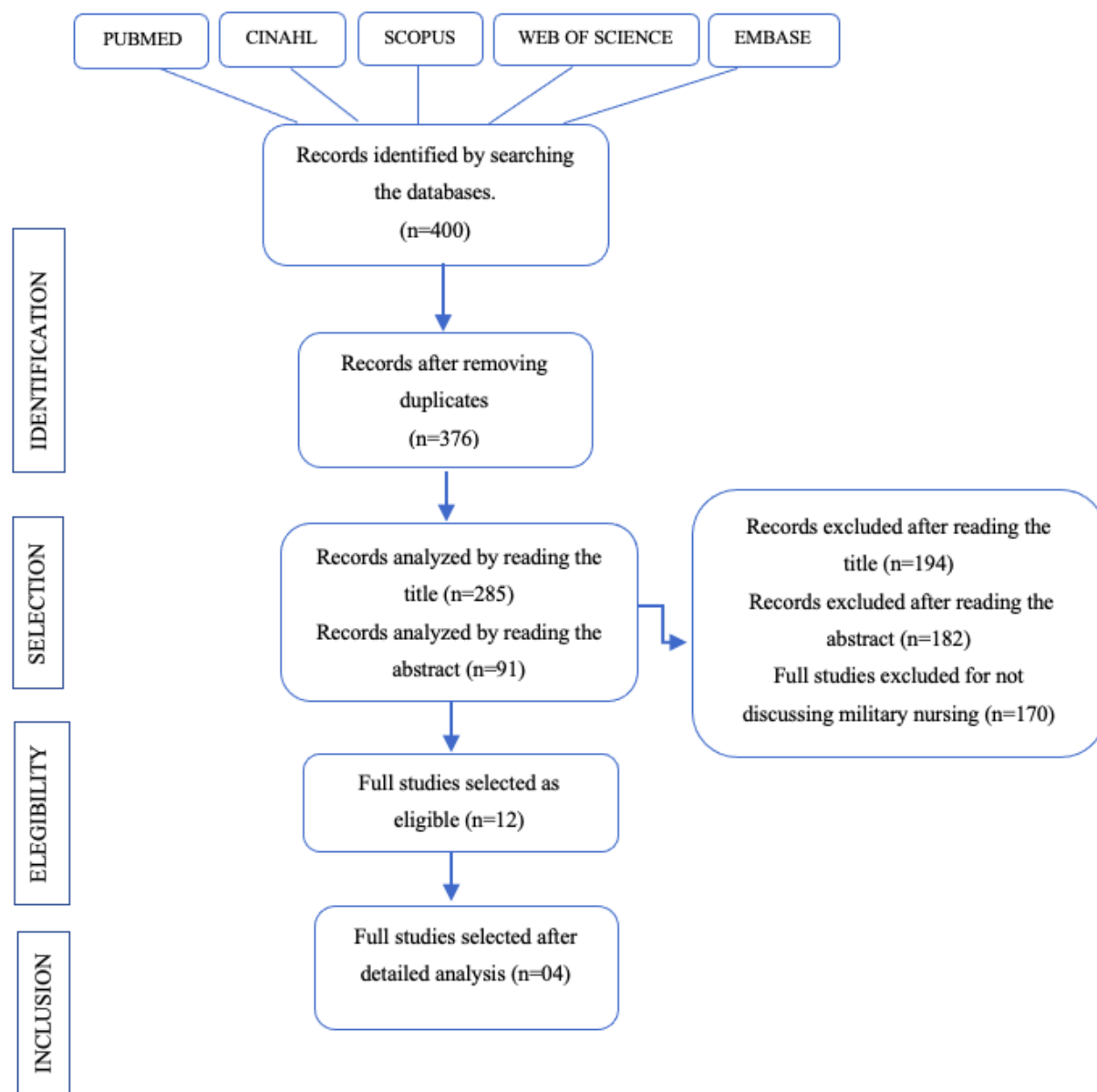
After the creation of the protocol with the four pre-selected articles, we conducted Laurence Bardin’s content analysis<sup>(18)</sup>, according

to the following steps: pre-analysis, an organization aiming to systematize the study's initial ideas; exploration of the material, which consists of a classification for the core of understanding; treatment of the obtained and interpreted results.

The ethical principles required for conducting this study were preserved, considering that it is

review research in which only secondary data from other studies are used, making it unnecessary to submit the project to a Research Ethics Committee.

Details on the results of the search strategy and selection of articles are shown in the PRISMA-ScR<sup>(19)</sup> flowchart in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** PRISMA-ScR search and selection flowchart for review articles. São Paulo, 2021.

## RESULTS

articles included in this review, with the main results.

Chart 2 shows the narrative synthesis of the

**Table 2.** Synthesis of articles included in the integrative review. São Paulo, Brazil, 2021.

| Author, Date, Country, Title   | Objective   | Study methodology  | Main results   |
|--|---|--|--|
| Sell CT; MI padilha; Perez MAA. (2015), Brazil. Military nurses: roles played from 1980 to 1997.   | To identify the roles played by nurses in Brazil's Women's Auxiliary Navy Reserve Corps (CAFRM) | A qualitative study with a socio-historical approach in which oral history was used as a source of research. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Sample= eight women who worked at CAFRMB from 1980 to 1997.   | The Brazilian Navy provided knowledge and professional growth to nurses, developed in different places, in addition to a military identity built throughout their careers.   |
| Sell CT; Padilha MI; Peres MAA. (2014), Brazil. Inter-professional relationships in the Brazilian Navy - an analysis from the perspective of gender.                           | To analyze inter-professional relationships in the Brazilian Navy from 1980 to 1997.            | A qualitative study with a socio-historical approach resulting from the master's dissertation entitled: Nurses in the Brazilian Navy: the historiography of the Women's Auxiliary Navy Reserve Corps. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Sample= eight women who worked in the Women's Auxiliary Navy Reserve Corps (CAFRMB) from 1980 to 1997.           | Young women, with higher education and pioneers in the Brazilian Army were the characteristics of CAFRM nurses. Over time, they won authority, duties, and responsibilities that led these women to rule and take on leadership positions empowerment  |
| Telford JC; Long TL. (2012). USA. Gendered spaces, gendered pages: Union women in Civil War nurse narratives.  | To analyze the roles played by women during the American Civil War.                             | A qualitative study of a socio-historical documentary approach of 3 literary works about the American Civil War. Sources: Books: "Women of the War: Their Heroism and Self Sacrifice"; "My Story of the War: A Woman's Narrative"; "S. Emma Edmond's memoir Nurse and Spy in the Union Army: The Adventures and Experiences of a Woman in Hospitals, Camps, and Battlefields". | It pointed to the expansion of women's social role in the 19 <sup>th</sup> century, as nurses in war, and that by entering male spaces such as the front, until then considered male and doctors domains, they converted them through professional autonomy and authority acquired in the exercise of their roles. |
| Ma H; Lin L; Zhang S; Lei L.; Jinyu H.; Fang L.; Yu L. (2021). China. Exploring competencies of military nurses in general hospitals in China: a qualitative content analysis. | To identify the skills of military nurses in general hospitals in China.                        | A qualitative study, social phenomenology approach, and content analysis conducted from April to June 2020. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Sample= 21 military nurses who work in the general hospital in China.  | 40 competencies which were categorized into four main categories according to the Onion Model: motive, traits, self-identity, and skills. The dual roles of military nurses: carrying out routine work and participating in military missions require skills in clinical and military skills from nurses.          |

**Source:** Authors.

Chart 3 shows the units of meaning and analysis, as well as the identities found. categories that emerged from the content

**Chart 3.** Synthesis of articles included in the integrative review according to the categories constructed through the content analysis. São Paulo, Brazil, 2021.

| Title  | Meaning units  | Categories   | Identities              |
|--|--|--|-------------------------|
| Exploring competencies of military nurses in general hospitals in China: a qualitative content analysis. | Commitment to the mission, perseverance, empathy, flexibility, and obedience.  | Professional identity of Military Nursing and its socio-affective meaning    | Social                  |
|  | Self-identity of dual roles.   | Professional identity of Military Nursing and its psychological meaning      | Professional x Military |
|  | Clinical and Military Nursing knowledge and skills.  | Intercession of the professional nursing identity with the military identity | Professional x Military |
|  | Basic Nursing Knowledge.   | Nursing professional identity  | Professional            |
|  | Capacity for professional development, leadership, and management.   | Professional identity of Military Nursing and its meaning of leadership      | Professional            |
| Military nurses: roles played from 1980 to 1997.   | Supervision positions such as lead nurse and unit supervisor.  | Professional identity of Military Nursing and its meaning of leadership      | Professional            |
|  | Satisfaction with the management performance of Military Nursing, despite the difficulties with the Navy bureaucracy due to the accumulation of extra duties that separate it from basic training. | Intercession of professional nursing identity with military identity         | Professional x Military |
|  | Military activities demonstrate commitment to the Navy, responsibility, and resignation of their basic academic training.  | Professional identity of Military Nursing and its socio-affective meaning    | Professional x Military |
| Inter-professional relationships in the Brazilian Navy - an analysis from the perspective of gender.     | Civilian nurses versus military nurses.  | Intercession of the professional nursing identity with the military identity | Professional x Military |
|  | Interpersonal relationships in the Navy: from the oldest to the most modern.   | Professional identity of Military Nursing and its socio-affective meaning    | Social                  |
| Gendered spaces, gendered pages: Union women in Civil War nurse narratives.                              | Social expansion of the role of women through participation in war as a nurse.   | Professional identity of Military Nursing and its psychosocial meaning       | Social                  |
|  | Autonomy and authority are built in interprofessional relationships.   | Professional identity of Military Nursing and its socio-affective meaning    | Social                  |

**Source:** Authors.

## DISCUSSION

To understand the categories that emerged from the analysis of the studies included in this integrative review, it was decided to start the discussion with the professional identity of military nursing and its socio-affective meaning, as it was the dimension that was observed most frequently. The socio-affective meaning was identified by attitudinal behaviors of authority, responsibility for the given mission, flexibility, empathy, and hierarchical obedience in interprofessional relationships<sup>(20-22)</sup>, and allows professional identity to be influenced by the relational interaction between hierarchical circles.

The socio-affective meaning leads to two other meanings to the professional identity of Military Nursing: the psychological and the psychosocial. Both meanings affect the self-identity of dual roles and the social expansion of the woman's role when she chooses to be a nurse in the Army<sup>(20-23)</sup>.

The psychological and psychosocial meanings are linked in the construction of a professional identity that makes the nurse recognize and be recognized as a military nurse. This acknowledgment will make her a professional who, despite working in a military environment predominantly male and led by doctors, will be able to impose herself in the achievement of places and leaderships that are still unequal in gender in the Army<sup>(10-13)</sup>. As for gaining leadership, this is still determined by medical representation in the health divisions of military high commands, which affects the biomedical and hospital-focused model of military health care and the subordination of nursing.

In this regard, the meaning of leading in the professional identity of military nursing is materialized by positions of units representativeness, such as nurse-leader or the unit's supervisor<sup>(11)</sup>, but not by the professional status of nursing to the unit, since she will only fulfill such positions according to the determining military hierarchical position.

A possibility of changing the meaning of the leadership professional identity of military nursing would be possible through the technical training of nursing in knowledge such as

management, which will allow a different perspective of leadership, according to a technical profile, and not only by the hierarchical chain<sup>(22)</sup>.

Over the centuries, and through the different social spaces achieved, including the military, nursing began to be institutionally recognized by the Army as military nursing or battle nursing<sup>(22)</sup>, thus interceding the professional identity of nursing with the military identity. This intersection made enabled us to find roles that sometimes corroborate an identity contradiction, just when nursing is redirected to military activities or functions differently from its basic training<sup>(11,20,22)</sup>. One option for minimizing this function deviation is the offer of a curriculum of competencies that characterize the professional identity profile and the required knowledge in military nursing<sup>(22)</sup>.

The linking of the professional nursing identity with the military identity is also in the health actions that nursing performs in field hospitals or military hospitals, as in these environments, health care is performed according to a directive flow of military hierarchy, and not only due to health demands<sup>(8,11,21)</sup>.

This link, which started in the Great Wars<sup>(1,3-4)</sup>, is perpetuated by the actions of those who choose to be a military nurse, and is permeated by challenges resulting from the absence of a professional identity that defines the meaning of military nursing as an area of nursing, and not as a military staff.

The professional identity of military nursing is established on the professional identity of nursing, whose basic nursing knowledge is important for applicability and adaptability to the reality of military health<sup>(22,24-25)</sup>. And the perception of the meanings that make up the professional identity of military nursing, according to a scientific approach to the studies published on the subject, helps in the instrumentalization of a knowledge that is recent, due to the lack of publications and because of the background of nursing in the frontline of battle.

Finally, the meanings of the professional identity of military nursing discussed in this study could be grouped into social, professional, and professional vs. military identities, since

they encompass constructs for reflections on gender, skills, and leadership intrinsic to these identities.

## CONCLUSION

This work allowed us to infer that military nursing is little addressed in the scientific literature in Brazil and worldwide. The analyzed studies answered the problem question once they explained how military nursing is described in the national and international scientific literature, through the discussion of themes that impact professional practice - leadership, skills, and gender relations. It was possible to analyze the professional identity of military nursing by identifying the identities that emerged from the units of meaning: professional identity, social identity, and military identity.

The main limitation of the study was the scarcity of publications about professional

identity in the military environment, which makes it difficult to carry out a deeper analysis of the subject. Another possible limiting aspect was the timeframe defined by the authors. Other studies can be carried out within a longer time frame, which should bring new results.

Regarding the contributions to future studies, we understand that research in military nursing about professional identity will work as a source of knowledge in an area that has been in demand since the interwar period, but little scientifically investigated, and not recognized as a specialty for curriculum training. This compromises professional practice, the representativeness of the military nursing class, and social recognition, especially when military nurses participate in missions to protect territorial sovereignty (such as health support to the troops), UN peacekeeping, or international health missions, but remain unnoticeable due to lack of public awareness of their role.

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## A IDENTIDADE PROFISSIONAL DA ENFERMAGEM MILITAR: UMA REVISÃO INTEGRATIVA

### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** analisar o tema da identidade profissional da enfermagem militar contido nas produções científicas mundiais. **Método:** trata-se de uma revisão integrativa da literatura de publicações compreendidas entre 2010 e 2021 nas bases indexadoras *Medical Literature and Retrival System on Line*, *Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature*, *Web of Science*, *Embase* e *Scopus*. Aplicou-se a estratégia PICO para estabelecer a questão de pesquisa "Como a Enfermagem Militar vem sendo retratada nos artigos nacionais e internacionais publicados?" e o gerenciador de referências *Rayyan QCRI* – (Qatar Computing Research Institute) para a seleção das publicações, o que resultou em quatro artigos submetidos à análise de conteúdo, segundo Bardin. **Resultados:** a enfermagem militar teve sua identidade profissional retratada pelos temas: competências na enfermagem militar, papéis das enfermeiras militares e relações de gênero. **Conclusão:** a identidade profissional da enfermagem militar ainda é pouco discutida na literatura, porém verifica-se um movimento para apontar o empoderamento dessas enfermeiras assim como a forte subordinação ao regime militar e ao profissional médico. Militares do gênero feminino sofrem de modo mais contundente, considerando que são minoria, sem possibilidades de ascender na carreira militar como aqueles do gênero masculino, e também devido ao tipo de organização da qual fazem parte.

**Palavras-chave:** Enfermagem. Enfermagem Militar. Identificação Social. Militares.

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## LA IDENTIDAD PROFESIONAL DE LA ENFERMERÍA MILITAR: UNA REVISIÓN INTEGRADORA

### RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** analizar el tema de la identidad profesional de la enfermería militar contenido en las producciones científicas mundiales. **Método:** se trata de una revisión integradora de la literatura de publicaciones comprendidas entre 2010 y 2021 en las bases indexadoras *Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online*, *Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature*, *Web of Science*, *Embase* y *Scopus*. Se aplicó la estrategia PICO para establecer la cuestión de investigación "¿Cómo la Enfermería Militar viene siendo retratada en los artículos nacionales e internacionales publicados?" y el gestor de referencias *Rayyan QCRI* - (Qatar Computing Research Institute) para la selección de las publicaciones, lo que resultó en cuatro artículos sometidos al análisis de contenido, según Bardin. **Resultados:** la enfermería militar tuvo su identidad profesional retratada por los temas: competencias en enfermería militar, roles de las enfermeras militares y relaciones de género. **Conclusión:** la identidad profesional de la enfermería militar aún es poco discutida en la literatura, pero



se verifica un movimiento para señalar el empoderamiento de estas enfermeras, así como la fuerte subordinación al régimen militar y al profesional médico. Militares del género femenino sufren de manera más contundente, considerando que son minoría, sin posibilidades de ascender en la carrera militar como aquellos del género masculino, y también debido al tipo de organización que forman parte.

**Palabras clave:** Enfermería. Enfermería Militar. Identificación Social. Militares.

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