

# WOMEN IN THE HISTORY OF NURSING IN PORTUGAL

## AS MULHERES NA HISTÓRIA DA ENFERMAGEM EM PORTUGAL

## LAS MUJERES EN LA HISTORIA DE LA ENFERMERÍA EN PORTUGAL

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**Objectives:** to temporally identify the presence of female nurses; to study the balance of distribution, by sex, between nurses and nurses; to perform critical reading of the feminization of Portuguese nursing; to identify people that at the end of the process of nursing professionalization in Portugal are biographed. **Method:** historical analysis of documentary sources in archives, published sources and review of studies. **Results:** there was the performance of nurses since the thirteenth century, with increased rate of feminization in Portugal only in the twentieth century and growth until its end. **Conclusion:** feminization in nursing is a process of the twentieth century, with significant expansion in the 1940s and following, due to ideological issues linked to the image of women in the Estado Novo, which at this time feels the late influence of Nightingale.

**Descriptors:** History of Nursing. Women. Feminization. Nurses. Nursing.

*Objetivos:* identificar temporalmente a presença de enfermeiras; estudar o equilíbrio da distribuição, por sexo, entre enfermeiras e enfermeiros; realizar leitura crítica da feminização da enfermagem portuguesa; identificar personalidades que, no final do processo de profissionalização da enfermagem em Portugal, encontram-se biografadas. *Método:* análise histórica de fontes documentais em arquivos, fontes publicadas e revisão de estudos. *Resultados:* verificou-se a atuação de enfermeiros e enfermeiras desde o século XIII, com aumento da taxa de feminização em Portugal apenas no século XX e crescimento até o término deste. *Conclusão:* a feminização em enfermagem é um processo do século XX, com expansão significativa na década de 40 e seguintes, por questões ideológicas ligadas à imagem da mulher no Estado Novo, que, nesse momento, sente a tardia influência de Nightingale.

*Descritores:* História da Enfermagem. Mulher. Feminização. Enfermeiras e Enfermeiros. Enfermagem.

*Objetivos:* identificar temporalmente la presencia de enfermeras; estudiar el equilibrio de la distribución, por sexo, entre enfermeras y enfermeros; realizar lectura crítica de la feminización de la enfermería portuguesa; identificar personalidades que, al final del proceso de profesionalización de la enfermería en Portugal, se encuentran biografadas. *Método:* análisis histórico de fuentes documentales en archivos, fuentes publicadas y revisión de estudios. *Resultados:* se verificó la actuación de enfermeros y enfermeras desde el siglo XIII, con aumento de la tasa de feminización en Portugal solo en el siglo XX y crecimiento hasta el término de éste. *Conclusión:* la feminización en enfermería es un

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*proceso del siglo XX, con expansión significativa en la década de 40 y siguientes, por cuestiones ideológicas ligadas a la imagen de la mujer en el Estado Nuevo, que, en ese momento, siente la tardía influencia de Nightingale.*

*Descriptor: Historia de la Enfermería. Mujeres. Feminización. Enfermeras y Enfermeros. Enfermería.*

## Introduction

The history of nursing, and specifically of Portuguese nursing, is confused with the trajectory of female nurses, since this profession has always been seen as female or, very significantly, mostly female. This statement, however, lacks scientific verification, which is why the present investigative synthesis is justified.

In this context, three questions deserve to be scored: are nursing and its movement of professionalization equal in all spaces, regions, countries, in order to allow a generalization to all contexts? What is happening today or in recent decades is what has always been observed? Are the available historical narratives, when describing and interpreting the history of nursing innocuous, that is, exempt from the influence of current ideologies and laudatory and corporate purposes? These are important questions, but not only are these in the initial motivation for this synthesis, because it is also important to question whether the activity of caring, attributed to the nurse, has always existed? Whether caring and nursing care are the same, or something different? Linked to these issues, two other emerge: Has there always been nursing? Have there always been female nurses?

It seems that investigating the presence and role of women in nursing in Portugal helps to clarify the questions posed. In this sense, the following objectives were established: to temporally identify the presence of female nurses; to study the balance of distribution, by sex, between female nurses and male nurses; to perform a critical reading of the feminization of Portuguese nursing; to identify people that at the end of the process of nursing professionalization in Portugal are biographed. Given the above, this synthesis of research is justified and becomes relevant by the contribution to a more objective reading of the development of nursing in Portugal.

## Method

Historical study of historical problematization, in the context of the history of nursing, which assumes as a starting point the issues expressed in the introduction and, as a purpose, what appears in the objectives formulated. The present study is based on the analysis of sources, original and published, contained in archives, documents from various sources, books, articles and academic dissertations, knowing that “[...] the documents, besides «not speaking for themselves?», do not even be a starting point”<sup>(1:185, emphasis added)</sup>. According to Ricoeur “[...] the facts [...] are not given in the documents, but the documents are selected according to a problem”<sup>(2:154)</sup>.

The problem is that of female nurses, in the movement of professionalization of Portuguese nursing. This process occurs over several centuries, which is why it was delimited for this study a temporal cut between the thirteenth century and the end of the twentieth century. In this sense, it sought an approach to the knowledge of the past, in the most objective way possible.

It was guided by the idea that the story “[...] is a representation, that is, a replica of what happened”<sup>(3:19)</sup>, and that the work of the historian “[...] is a watchful look on what flowed and what flows, on what in the change remains”<sup>(4:15)</sup>. This look must be translated into the elaboration of a historical discourse, which, in addition to the possible scientific objectivity provided by the work on source, “[...] must also be inspired by the processes of imagination and perspicacity”<sup>(5:25)</sup>. In this way, the contexts and the chronological evolutionary lines are considered, with continuities and ruptures, in order to build an interpretative critical synthesis in the search for real meanings without anachronisms.

It should be noted that this study did not involve ethical issues other than those inherent to the guarantee of rigor and scientific originality.

## Results and Discussion

### *Long presence of male and female nurses*

In the middle ages, with the Gregorian Reformation of the church, the Rule of St. Benedict gradually spread throughout Europe. In Portugal, Dona Mumadona Dias, in Guimarães, in 959, already knew it<sup>(6)</sup>. However, only in the following centuries, such Rule expanded to the most diverse monasteries of the North and Center of Portugal. According to this author, “[...] the first known documents on the observance of the Rule of St. Benedict in Portuguese territory are in the monastery of Vilela in 1086, and in the monastery of S. Romão de Neiva in the year 1087”<sup>(6:62)</sup>.

As the Rule was adopted by the ancient Cenobii, there was a gradual specialization of the functions of the monks, which is evident in the successive texts of this document. At first, the function of *cellerarius* arose, with vast functions, including the care of the sick. Then, the function of nurse (*infirmarius*) was differentiated and autonomized, and later, other specializations succeeded. The nurse, in the Benedictine monasteries, would be the monk chosen by the abbot to take care of the sick brothers and brothers, to be responsible and to organize the assistance in a space dedicated to this function, space taken from the central areas of the monastery and identified as infirmary.

When reading documents of the thirteenth century, published by Souto Cabo, there was a record, with the precise identification of some male nurses and female nurses, such as: in 1257, *Plas G. ramiris infirmarios Frati rudericus*; in 1260, *Garsia. Móogo enfermeyro*; in 1268, *Jobã Perez nurse*; in 1269, *Maria Fonso enfermeyra*<sup>(7)</sup>. It is not known whether the latter two are in monastic context or not in monastic society, but are men and women with concrete names.

Later, in Jorge da Mina, in present-day Ghana, in the Gulf of Guinea, a military, commercial,

logistics and assistance warehouse for the route of the Portuguese caravels heading to India, the nurse Afonso Freyre was found in the regiment of 1514 (eventually religious *Freyre*), and in the regiment of 1524, as auxiliaries for the work of the infirmary, Agnes, Fernanda, Beatrice and Catherine. In the infirmary of S. Jorge da Mina, a male nurse was present at least since 1510, and, to serve in the infirmary, auxiliary women, at least since 1495-99. These were royal salaried workers for the execution of hierarchical and differentiated tasks. The care space – ward – was equipped, occupied permanently and intended for this specific function<sup>(8)</sup>.

In Coimbra, there were references to male nurses, along with female nurses, for example, at the Convalescence Hospital in 1764. This hospital will have as “family assistants”: male nurse, female nurse, buyer, cook, and a doctor who cannot be of the “obligation of the Royal Hospital”<sup>(9:541)</sup>. An analysis of the documentation of the Hospital of S. Lázaro, in Coimbra, in 1779, found accumulation of functions of the bleeder, a *nurse-bleeder*, and the female nurse accumulates with the function of cook, a situation once again found in 1790/97<sup>(9)</sup>.

Following this, in the Regulation of the Royal Hospital of the University of Coimbra, in 1779, it was arranged that there should be in the Hospital *Male Nurses* and *Female Nurses*. The following composition was identified: a storekeeper, a clerk, two doctors, an ordinary surgeon if necessary, two chaplains, a pantry, a doorman, a doorwoman, two cooks, a wardrobe, a janitor, nurses and servants<sup>(9)</sup>. All articulated and in constant interaction. The faithful steward would be available to the surgeon or nurse in case of extraordinary precision. The nurses and the servants had to search the kitchen for the food of the sick, which was forbidden to be done by the nurses who received them in the circle. The doorman called the nurse to refer the patients through the “acceptance ticket”<sup>(9:549)</sup>. As for the servants, it was “to help the nurses with all that is commanded them”<sup>(9:550)</sup>, in the hours of rest; the men work in the workshops and the women in the clothes. The wardrobe “will be careful to always have prompt yarns, bandages for the

Surgical Cures”<sup>(9:551)</sup>, and would always have bed linen available in quantity four times the number of existing beds<sup>(9)</sup>. In the impediments of the closet, some nurse would serve<sup>(9)</sup>. It was further determined that “Nurses will help each other, and will replace each other’s hindrance”<sup>(9:549)</sup>. Significantly, in 1791, there was a place for the nurse of the births in the hospitals of the University of Coimbra.

In the regulation of 1803, of the Royal Hospital of the University of Coimbra, a tax officer is quoted, who “[...] will attend the ministry of Remedies putting all caution so that it is given in time, and so that [...]” is not exchanged<sup>(9:559)</sup>. It is also mentioned that “The female nurses, and their servants, in their spare time will no longer be able to work for themselves, much less require the Convalescent Patients to work for them: some will take the time to make wires, and fix the hospital clothes [...]”<sup>(9:557)</sup>.

At the General Hospital of Santo António, in Porto, between 1886 and 1899, for a total of 219 staff, there were 150 male nurses and 69 female nurses<sup>(10)</sup>.

Up to this point, there was reference only to male nurses and female nurses, not to nursing. This term, which designates the professional

collective, only appears at the end of the nineteenth century<sup>(1896)</sup>, in line with the moment of professionalization that settles for this decade.

On the stage of the First World War<sup>(1914-1918)</sup>, in 1916, the Portuguese Expeditionary Corps had the participation of a mission of the Portuguese Red Cross, consisting of 2 officers, 54 female nurses, 26 male nurses, totaling 82 people. At the same time, in 1917, Elzira Machado, wife of the President of the Portuguese Republic, Bernardino Machado, organized the Crusade of Portuguese Women, thus initiating the training of women in nursing for assistance in war<sup>(11)</sup>.

In a survey conducted in the Yearbooks of the University of Coimbra, between the years 1896/97 and 1926/27, for 104 names of male nurses, female nurses and midwives, there is a total of 53 male nurses and 51 female nurses and midwives<sup>(12)</sup>. In consultation with the Hospital Bulletins of the University of Coimbra of 1931, there was the reference, between 1919 and 1930, of 336 students enrolled in the Nursing School of Hospitals of the University of Coimbra, of which 216 were men and 120 women. In the same time series and in the same document, 143 completed the nursing course, being 87 men and 56 women<sup>(13)</sup> (Table 1).

**Table 1** – Distribution of students at the School of Nursing of the Hospitals of the University of Coimbra, according to gender. Coimbra, Portugal – 1919-1930. N=336

Situation	N. of students	Male	Female
Enrolled	336	216	120
Completed	143	87	56

Source: created by the authors.

*Feminization of nursing, a process that became more pronounced in the 40s of the 20th century*

Still on the time series survey, it is important to mention the number of 95 male students and 184 female students from four Nursing schools

in 1942. There were also 30 male professors and 6 female professors, a trend that, over time, was significantly reversed<sup>(14)</sup> (Table 2).

**Table 2** – Distribution of students and professors by nursing schools and gender. Coimbra, Lisbon, Porto, Portugal – 1942

Schools/City	Students		Professors	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Dr. Ângelo da Fonseca - Coimbra	32	15	4	-
Artur Ravara – Lisbon	50	107	5	-
Escola Técnica de Enfermeiras - Lisbon	-	28	18	6
Hospital Santo António – Porto	13	34	3	-
Total	95	184	30	6

Source: Morais MCS<sup>(14;278)</sup>

Note: Conventional signal used:

- Numeric data equal to zero not resulting from rounding.

Between 1945 and 1969, a study found, for the first time, records with gender differentiation of health professionals, in which there is a higher percentage of male nurses. However, the years of 1958, 1963, 1966, 1968 and 1969, in which there are more female nurses than male nurses, have already been excluded<sup>(15)</sup>. These data are corroborated by another study, in which female

nurses and nursing assistants are the majority in 1963, 1966, 1968 and 1969<sup>(14)</sup> (Table 3). Therefore, the data for some years maintain balance, but there is a numerical difference to gain expression by the increasingly female presence in the profession, verifying a clear transition to female predominance, to confirm the trend since the 1940s.

**Table 3** – Distribution of nurses and nursing assistants in healthcare establishments in Portugal, by category and sex. Portugal – 1963-1969

Year	Male and Female Nurses				Nursing Assistants				
	MW	M	W	Feminization rate	MW	M	W	Feminization rate	
1963	4138	1637	2481	0.599	5225	1192	4033	0.771	
1966	4284	1741	2543	0.593	6477	1438	5039	0.777	
1968	4315	1976	2739	0.634	7137	1501	5636	0.789	
1969	4821	1958	2863	0.593	7485	1696	5789	0.773	
Average feminization rate				0,604	Average feminization rate				0.777
Joint feminization rate = 0.690									

Source: Morais MCS<sup>(14;298)</sup>

M: Men; W: women.

The set of numbers available and rate, according to sex, in the successive series<sup>(1886-1955)</sup>, consisted of 11 samples, which, although with some geographic dispersion, shows balance and allows the analysis of the evolution of representation by sex between professionals and students from the beginning to the end of Nursing courses. Moreover, in the series completed in the 1940s, the rate of feminization was generally higher than masculinization: 1<sup>st</sup>-year students at S. Marcos Hospital, in Braga, totaled 59.32%; in Santo António Hospital, in Porto, there was a total of 53.62%; and students in four schools rising to 65.95% in 1942.

The data in Table 4 show totals in each series, verifying oscillations in the succession of years, such as: the students of the 1<sup>st</sup> year at the Santo António Hospital in Porto, from 1896 to 1920, with global rate of feminization of 51.42%, presents, in the year 1917-1918, feminization rate of 63.27%; in 1918-1919, of 66.67%; and in 1919-1920, of 65%. Students of the 1<sup>st</sup> year of Hospital S. Marcos, in Braga (1911 to 1920), feminization rate of 60.64%.

In the transition from the nineteenth century to the twentieth century, in the period of 1886-1899, it is found that, from a male predominance (68.49%), according to the series concerning the

nursing staff of the Hospital Santo António, in Porto, passes to relative balance in the series of 1896-1920, (rates of 48.58% men and 51.42% women). In the University Hospitals, in Coimbra, in the years 1896-1927, these rates were also of balance, with 50.96% men and 49.04% women.

Another possible finding by the analysis of the rates of the 11 series is that feminization

in Coimbra is later than in northern Portugal (Porto and Braga). In Coimbra, students at the School, in a significant way, emerge with a male predominance until the 1930s, with masculinization rates of 64.28% for those who start and 60.84% for those who finish (Table 4).

**Table 4** – Distribution, according to sex, in the time series studied. Porto, Braga, Coimbra, Portugal – 1886-1955

Years	Series	Men		Women		Total	Reference
		n	%	n	%		
1886-1899	Licensed nursing staff at Hospital Santo António, Porto	150	68.49	69	31.51	219	10
1896-1920	1 <sup>st</sup> -year Students of the General Nursing Course at Hospital Santo António, Porto	341	48.58	361	51.42	702	10
1896-1927	Yearbooks of the University of Coimbra – University Hospitals	53	50.96	51	49.04	104	12
1911-1920	1 <sup>st</sup> -year Students of the General Nursing Course at Hospital São Marcos, Braga	37	39.36	57	60.64	94	10
1919-1930	Students from the School of Nursing at the University of Coimbra Hospitals <i>Enrolled</i> <i>Completed</i>	216	64.28	120	35.72	336	13
		87	60.84	56	39.16	143	
1920-1940	1 <sup>st</sup> -Year Students of the General Nursing Course at Hospital Santo António, Porto	468	46.38	541	53.62	1.009	10
1923-1939	1 <sup>st</sup> -Year Students of the General Nursing Course at Hospital São Marcos, Braga	24	40.68	35	59.32	59	10
1942	Students in Portugal at four nursing schools	95	34.05	184	65.95	279	14
1940-1955	1 <sup>st</sup> -Year Students of the General Nursing Course at Hospital Santo António, Porto	162	31.83	347	68.17	509	10
1940-1955	1 <sup>st</sup> -Year Students of the General Nursing Course at Hospital São Marcos, Braga	24	18.32	107	81.68	131	10

Source: created by the authors.

After 1942, feminization was fully installed, as we can see in the time series analyzed. In 1942, considering the students of four Nursing schools, the rate of feminization reached 65.95%; from 1940 to 1955, students of the 1<sup>st</sup> year of the general Nursing course of the Hospital de Santo António, in Porto, the rate of feminization was 68.17%; and in S. Marcos, in Braga, 81.68%.

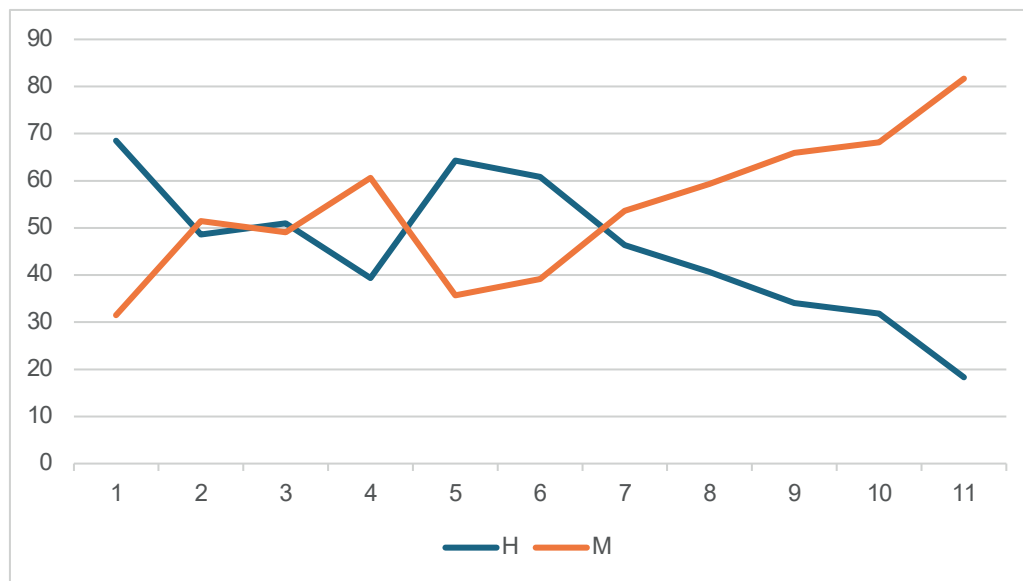
As a milestone of this transition, the year 1942 stands out by the earlier occurrence of feminization in the north of the country and, later, in Coimbra. The ascending curve of feminization coincides with the beginning of the period of professionalization – transition from the nineteenth century to the twentieth. The female predominance is reached in the Estado

Novo, when the presence of Florence Nightingale is felt.

Clearly, although the data are not continuous flow, it appears that the upward trend of feminization of nursing professionals and students is resumed in the 1919-1930 time series (n. 5 in the Graph 1 caption) and gains meaning when it exceeds the rate of masculinization, which occurs

in the time series 1920-1940 (n. 7 in the Graph 1 caption), and always keeps growing until today. In the time series 1911-1920 (n. 4 in the Graph 1 caption), there is a female predominance, but it should be emphasized that the data in this series are related to the Hospital S. Marcos, warning to the possibility of regional differences to be investigated in later studies.

**Graph 1** – Percentage distribution according to sex in the time series studied. Braga, Porto, Portugal – 1886-1955



Source: created by the authors.

Caption: 1: 1886-1899; 2: 1896-1920; 3: 1896-1927; 4: 1911-1920; 5: 1919-1930 (enrolled); 6: 1919-1930 (completed); 7: 1920-1940; 8: 1923-1939; 9: 1942; 10: 1940-1955 (Porto); 11: 1940-1955 (Braga).

Figure translation: H - Men; M - Women.

The statement that: “[...] in the nineteenth century discourse, certain professions are included in the extension of the «natural functions of women», maternal and domestic, which involve helping, caring for and comforting family members and other loved ones [...] This is the case of nursing, which becomes a career during the Estado Novo (1933-1974), accompanying the professionalization of the sector [...]”<sup>(16:97, emphasis added)</sup>.

The analysis, in a timely manner, as a study<sup>(15)</sup>, among others, includes the restrictions in the Estado Novo to female work, which marked expressively the work in nursing. It refers to Decree-Law n. 31913, of March 12, 1942, which reserved the provision of hospital nursing for

unmarried women or widows without children. In this sense, the pretension of closure with the idea of a dedicated *wife and mother nurse* and the consequent feminization of the profession led to the reduction of candidates and the necessary maintenance of men<sup>(15)</sup>.

This situation, anachronistic, was object of contestation and struggle of male nurses and female nurses. Maria Fernanda Resende<sup>(1923-1988)</sup>, in 1956, stated: “It seems to us of absolute necessity to amend the decree-Law n. 31913, 4<sup>th</sup>, of art: 3<sup>rd</sup>, which prohibits the marriage of female nurses. As long as the female nurse is by vocation, and has the required qualities, there are in many cases even advantages in marriage,

since the married female nurse faces some problems differently and in some cases more advantageous. As long as there are reasonable hours, it is perfectly possible for married female nurses to work. Moreover, special staff for services in reduced working hours can be organized with great advantage for hospitals<sup>(17:24)</sup>.

Significant was the struggle for the right to marriage, triggered by nurse Isaura Borges Coelho<sup>(1926-2019)</sup>. According to the website of the Portuguese Society of Nursing History, this was referred to by PIDE agents as *the matchmaker*, at the time she worked at the Capuchos Hospital, where she managed to collect seven hundred signatures of staff, protesting against the ban. But “Borges Coelho also denounced the terrible working conditions that, at the time, were lived in hospitals: 12 or 24-hour shifts, night shifts (the so-called “candles”) 30 days in a row (called the *30-candle regime*), only with a weekly and mandatory break of 6 in 6 months, lack of material such as clothing or technical material and sick lying on mattresses on the floor<sup>(18)</sup>”.

The fight of Isaura Borges Coelho for the marriage of female nurses began when 12 female nurses from the Júlio de Matos hospital were fired for being married. She was arrested and sentenced by the Lisbon Plenary Court in 1954 to two-year imprisonment, loss of political rights for 15 years and extendable *security measures*, which meant that her imprisonment lasted four years, two in isolation, being expelled from public service<sup>(18)</sup>.

After years of struggle and contestation, only in 1963, through Decree-Law N. 44923 of March 18, the marriage of female nurses from civil hospitals was authorized, however, with some indifference, “[...] to recognize the advantages of, whenever possible, contributing, through legislative measures, to remove the married woman from worries and environments foreign to her home, where the noblest mission is reserved to her<sup>(19:270)</sup>”. As Irene Kitty says: “It will, however, in the Estado Novo, from the end of the thirties and, especially, already in the forties, formalize gender discrimination, a trend that will begin to change from 1960 due to the need to

increase the body of health technicians, in order to launch, at national level, a network of regional and sub-regional hospitals and prophylactic and health campaigns<sup>(16:114)</sup>”.

Maria Teresa Santos, in preface to the work of Marília Viterbo de Freitas, 2012, refers to “[...] given the comparative data between the years 1974 and 1995, there is an increase in the feminization of the profession in the order of 63.6% to 81.8%<sup>(20:VII)</sup>”.

In an interview with *Jornal de Notícias*, in 2019, Professor Paulo Parente, president at the time of the Nursing School of Porto, mentioned that 85.1% of the school candidates were women<sup>(21)</sup>. With the entry into higher education of nursing training, the rates of feminization are in line with the rates of feminization of all Portuguese higher education.

Data for 2023, provided by the Order of Nurses, in the National Statistics Yearbook, reveal the existence of 83,538 nurses, being 69,069 (82.52%) women and 14,469 (17.32%) men<sup>(22)</sup>. When analyzing the distribution by large geographical areas, there was an insignificant dispersion of the rate of feminization, but higher in the North of the country.

The non-linear movement of gradual increase of feminization in the nursing profession, finds explanation in ideological reasons, represented response to emerging social needs, and greater presence of women in society. Despite the ideological constraints, “[...] the recognition by the State of the growing need for care was leading, in an explicit and implicit way, particularly during the Estado Novo, to an identity of nursing built according to the female stereotype and the feminization of the profession<sup>(15:50)</sup>”. However, in fact, the feminization of nursing, “[...] allowed female nurses to take a prominent place in the health system and constituted an element that values the role of women in society<sup>(16:114)</sup>”.

Under a more intertwined analysis of the data, there is, with Nightingale, a feminine view of care, with morally irreproachable female nurses, the result of an integral education. In Portugal, there is, after the forties of the twentieth century, strong feminization of nursing. According to



Escobar: “The 1940s marks a turning point in the guidelines of schools regarding the admission of candidates according to gender. Most schools begin to give preference to admit women”<sup>(15:53)</sup>. Florence Nightingale, considered the founder of modern nursing, declared that nursing was an appropriate profession par excellence for women, contrary to medicine. Maybe for this same reason the nursing school founded in London in 1860 was exclusively female<sup>(23)</sup>. In contrast, in Portugal, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, “[...] there is no academic tradition in nursing education, the first courses founded were based on the French model of the schools of the *Assistance Publique de Paris* [...]”<sup>(23:153)</sup>, outside the influence of Nightingale, previously based on rationalist positivism.

In Portugal, “Shortly after, in 1947, more and more female nursing professionals began to graduate, but with a lower degree, the nursing assistant course”<sup>(15:57)</sup>. At the end of the 1940s, the homes of the female students emerged as a paradigm for the integral training of future female nurses, in a vision, now very Nightingalian.

Nevertheless, previously, in Portugal, a nursing only for women was envisaged, which is well evident at the time of the emergence of the Nursing School of S. Vicente de Paulo, in 1937, in Lisbon. Then, in 1940, there is the same trend at the Technical School of Nurses, linked to the Portuguese Institute of Oncology (IPO), in Lisbon, sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation<sup>(20)</sup>. In Coimbra, in 1946, the Rainha Santa Isabel Nursing School was created, a women’s school, for the training of model female nurses.

Escobar, when analyzing the legislation regarding the admission criteria, according to sex, identifies three major moments with differentiated policies: at the beginning of the emergence of schools, where there are no explicit references to the sex of candidates in the legal acts; between the 1940s and the mid-1970s, when the Estado Novo makes explicit its preference for the admission of women and creation of training courses for nursing care providers with a socio-professional category lower than that of nurses

(nursing assistant); and in the period after April 25, because explicit references to candidate preference no longer appear in legal texts<sup>(16)</sup>.

*At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, so many female nurses and so many leaders*

In the transition from the twentieth century to the twenty-first century, there is nursing characterized by high rates of feminization, which, in a growing trend, as seen earlier, since the 1940s, follows the movement of high feminization of higher education in Portugal. It is not surprising that, in the aftermath, two works with biographies in Portuguese nursing emerged at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: the first entitled *Vidas de Enfermeiras*<sup>(24)</sup>, with the biography of 25 women born between 1860-1949 (Chart 1); and the second, *25 Anos de Regulação na Enfermagem, 96 Perfis e Trajetórias Assinaláveis*<sup>(25)</sup>, which found that of the 96 profiles, 62 (64.58%) were female nurses (Chart 2).

In this context, if each female nurse is worth by herself, for her life history, for the contributions to the professional collective, to the society around her and to which she dedicates her work, therefore, it is of great interest to know those who have been elected as representatives and the criteria for their choice.

Teresa Santos, in Preface, in the book *Vidas de Enfermeiras*, written by Viterbo de Freitas<sup>(1933-2015)</sup>, states: “Among the selection criteria established, there is one that had priority and served as a starting point of the investigation: public recognition and interpairs of biographies”<sup>(20:X)</sup>, that is, those recognized and that remained in the memory of colleagues as a professional reference. She adds as criteria: “[...] the pioneering: in the internationalization of training and intervention, in the direction of schools, courses, magazines, in the academic pursuit, in the participation in associative movements and in the exercise of political positions, at the municipal or governmental level”<sup>(20:X)</sup>.

**Chart 1** – Biographical list from the book *Vidas de Enfermeiras*, 25 women born between 1860-1949. Portugal.

Ana Guedes da Costa (1860-1947)	Beatriz Plácido de Mello Corrêa (1923)
Maria Angélica Lima Basto Hansen (1906-1944)	Maria de Nazareth Palheiro (1927-2000)
Maria Palmira Tito de Morais (1912-2003)	Mariana Dulce Diniz de Sousa (1929-2013)
Fernanda Alves Diniz (1913-2001)	Maria Teresa Pequito Afonso Vilela (1930- 2011)
Maria Medina Monjardino Brito do Rio (1914-1998)	Maria de Lourdes Carvalho de Sales Luís (1931)
Rosélia Ribeiro Ramos (1916-2003)	Delmina dos Anjos Moreira (1932-2018)
Maria Luiza Moniz Pereira (1918-1963)	Maria de Lurdes M. Salgueiro Gibral (1933-1992)
Emília Maria da Costa Macedo (1918-2007)	Nídia Rodrigues Mendes Salgueiro (1934)
Maria Madalena Taveira (1919-2005)	Maria Eduarda S. C. Lalandia Gonçalves (1934)
Dilia Almeida Ribeiro (1920-2009)	Maria Aurora Sousa Bessa (1936)
Crisanta Monteiro Regala (1920-2008)	Marta Hansen Lima B. Correia Frade (1940)
Maria Fernanda Rezende (1923-1988)	Maria Arminda S. M. Carneiro da Costa (1949)
Hermínia Correia Ribeiro (1923-2007)	

Source: created by the authors.

The other book, *25 Anos de Regulação na Enfermagem, 96 Perfis e Trajetórias Assinaláveis*, edited by the Portuguese Society of Nursing History, defines, for the junction of 96 remarkable profiles, “[...] personalities who gather some consensus around the following criteria: i) leading action in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, extending to the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; ii) involvement in professional regulation, especially before and at the time of the foundation of the Order of Nurses (creation of the REPE, OE Installation Commission and first mandate); iii) participation and leadership in professional organizations (associations and unions); and iv) involvement in

the development of the profession and discipline, in its area of activity and influence”<sup>(25:22)</sup>.

Certainly, other female figures will have stood out. First, it is important to mention the authors, the mayors and the organizers of these two works, the first: Marília Viterbo de Freitas and Maria Teresa Silva Santos (mayor); and the Organizing Committee of the book *25 Anos de Regulação na Enfermagem, 96 Perfis e Trajetórias Assinaláveis*, Amélia Maria da Fonseca Simões Figueiredo, Ana Maria Barros Pires, Elisa Maria Bernardo Garcia, Lucília Rosa Mateus Nunes and Maria Amélia Dias Ferreira.

**Chart 2** – List of the 62 nurses from the book *25 Anos de Regulação na Enfermagem, 96 Perfis e Trajetórias Assinaláveis*

Aida Maria de Oliveira Cruz Mendes	Maria de Oliveira Nave Pires Medeiros
Ana Campos Reis	Maria do Céu Aguiar Barbieri de Figueiredo
Ana Maria Baptista Oliveira Dias Malva Vaz	Maria do Rosário Silvestre Machado
Ana Maria Correia Albuquerque Queiroz	Maria Ernestina Cruz Neto
Ana Maria Germano	Maria Gabriela do N. Martins Cavaco Calado
Ana Maria Loff de Almeida	Maria Gorete Mendonça dos Reis
Ana Maria Pacheco	Maria Helena Cadete Bernardo
Ana Paula Gato Rodrigues Polido Rodrigues	Maria Henriqueta de Jesus Silva Figueiredo
Ana Paula Gonçalves Antunes Sapeta	Maria Irene Alves Santos
Ana Sara Cavalheiro Alves de Brito	Maria Isabel Gomes de Sousa Lage
Ângela Maria Meireles Moás Prior	Maria José Ferreira Lopes Teixeira Pestana
Armandina do Carmo Antunes	Maria José Tavares de Pina Borges Ferreira
Beatriz Rodrigues Araújo	Maria Júlia Matos Anastácio
Elisa da Conceição de Oliveira Teles Dias de Melo	Maria Manuela Almendra Magalhães
Isabel Maria L.de Azevedo Costa Pavão Nunes	Maria Manuela Amaral de Sousa
Lídia Gomes Valinho	Maria Manuela Ferreira Pereira da Silva Martins
Lília Rosa Alexandre Vara	Maria Manuela Geraldês Gândara Janeiro Salvado
Lisete de Sousa Lourenço Fradique Ribeiro	Maria Margarida da Costa da Cunha Rosa
Maria Adelina Bandeira Correia	Maria Margarida Leitão Filipe
Maria Amélia José Monteiro	Maria Margarida Rego Pereira
Maria Arminda da Silva Mendes Carneiro da Costa	Maria Merícia Gouveia R. Bettencourt Jesus
Maria Augusta Purificação Rodrigues de Sousa	Maria Natália Gomes Filipe
Maria Celeste Ornelas de Carvalho	Maria Rosa Norberto Nogueira
Maria Clarisse Carvalho Martins Louro	Maria Teresa de Oliveira Marçal Gonçalves Novo
Maria da Conceição Jorge Martins	Maria Teresa dos Santos Rebelo
Maria da Graça Carvalho da Silva Machado	Maria Teresa A. Quintão Pereira Barreira Antunes
Maria da Graça Godinho Simões Eliseu	Mercedes Gallego Bilbao de Carvalho
Maria da Graça Santos Neves Carneiro	Mercedes Olazabal
Maria de Fátima Ascenso Coelho Figueira	Nídia Rodrigues Mendes Salgueiro
Maria Guadalupe Miranda Simões	Otilia Maria Teixeira Fernandes
Maria de Lurdes Esteves Asseiro da Luz	Regina Teixeira de Sousa

Source: created by the authors.

It is important to mention that men have not disappeared from Portuguese nursing, and there are also leaders and examples among them. However, the highlight and theme in this study are women in the history of nursing, which currently predominate in Portuguese nursing, with fair prominence, and in number of staff over 80%.

The main limitation of this study concerns the increased effort of narrative synthesis of a long time horizon, with eventual loss of information, especially in the details.

The main contribution of the study lies in the dismantling of the professional myth of the always predominant female nurses. It is demonstrated that, for Portuguese nursing, feminization is a phenomenon of the twentieth century.

## Conclusion

Regarding the four objectives outlined, it is concluded that, since always, in Portugal, there were women identified as nurses, along with men identified as nurses, one and the other, monastic or not. The data until the end of the nineteenth century do not allow the accurate evaluation of the rates of feminization and masculinization, but it is known that individuals of both sexes lived together and reached the end of the nineteenth century with higher rates of masculinization. However, feminization was accentuated in the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, coinciding with the acceleration of professionalization and became striking and constantly expanding from the 1940s.

Moreover, it was found that the feminization of Portuguese nursing temporally linked to the Estado Novo, and paradoxically under its influence, coincides with the visibility of Nightingale. Another important conclusion is that, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the rate of feminization is over 80% and women nurses, throughout the trajectory of their affirmation and nursing affirmation, assumed themselves as leaders, including with significant number of biographical records.

### Collaborations:

1 – conception and planning of the project: Paulo Joaquim Pina Queirós;

2 – analysis and interpretation of data: Paulo Joaquim Pina Queirós and Gilberto Tadeu Reis da Silva;

3 – writing and/or critical review: Paulo Joaquim Pina Queirós and Gilberto Tadeu Reis da Silva;

4 – approval of the final version: Paulo Joaquim Pina Queirós and Gilberto Tadeu Reis da Silva.

### Competing interests

There are no competing interests.

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