



An Overview of Entrepreneurship in Nursing: Challenges, Opportunities, and Barriers

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Abstract

Background: Nursing entrepreneurship presents promising opportunities for nurses. However, the development of entrepreneurship in nursing still faces several challenges. This overview aims to review and summarize the main characteristics of nursing entrepreneurship, including its concept, barriers, and opportunities in today's healthcare landscape.

Materials and Methods: In this overview, online databases (Medline, Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, ProQuest, CIVILICA, and Google Scholar search engine) were searched in both English and Persian up to March 2023, using combinations of keywords such as "nursing entrepreneurship", "nursing entrepreneurial", "barriers of nursing entrepreneurship", "opportunities of nursing entrepreneurship", "nurses", and "nursing students".

Results: A total of five reviews and two systematic reviews were included. The concept of entrepreneurship in nursing was related to personal and professional characteristics, such as autonomy, independence, flexibility, innovation, proactivity, self-confidence, and responsibility. The study identified seven barriers: fear, lack of knowledge and skills, prior working culture experience, decision-making policies and regulations, health insurance limitations, colleague jealousy, and unprofessional attitudes. Two supporting factors were also recognized: knowledge and skills, and the ability to seek opportunities. It was found that entrepreneurial nurses require personal, interpersonal, commercial, and strategic skills, and both internal and external stimuli are necessary to motivate nurses to overcome these challenges.

Conclusion: Entrepreneurial nurses require personal, interpersonal, commercial, and strategic skills. Therefore, it is essential to identify the challenges and needs of entrepreneurial nurses and address their obstacles to create the necessary foundations for nursing entrepreneurship, enabling them to effectively meet the health needs of individuals and communities. The barriers facing entrepreneurial nurses primarily stem from a lack of entrepreneurial knowledge, experience, and skills.

Key Words: Barriers, Concept, Nursing entrepreneurship, Opportunities, Nurses.

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1- INTRODUCTION

The word entrepreneurship is derived from the French word "entreprendre", meaning "to undertake", and was translated into English in 1848 (1). Entrepreneurship has been a focus of educational circles worldwide since the late 20th century and has become a source of significant developments in industries, education, and services. Entrepreneurial skills encompass a diverse range of abilities, including research, analysis, communication, creativity, networking, financial literacy, leadership, negotiation, and management (2-5).

Entrepreneurship in healthcare is not a new phenomenon. Many nurses worked as entrepreneurs before World War II. After the war, nurses in many countries began working primarily in the public service sector due to significant social and economic changes. Social, political, and economic factors—including economic crises, nurses' professional dissatisfaction, and evolving health needs of people and consumers—have motivated many nurses to pursue entrepreneurship during the past few decades. A nurse entrepreneur offers diverse nursing services in the private sector, spanning care, education, research, and administrative domains (6).

The International Council of Nurses defines a nurse entrepreneur as "a proprietor of a business that offers nursing services of a direct care, educational, research, administrative, or consultative nature" (7). Nurse entrepreneurs can play an essential role in the healthcare system by supporting the development of targeted services, such as nursing entrepreneurship or nursing businesses (8). However, according to a study in 2018, nurses represented only a 6% share of entrepreneurship compared to other health professions, such as medicine and physiotherapy (9). Education can play a crucial role in creating a context for new entrepreneurs (10). Some studies indicate

that the lack of entrepreneurial competence is a significant barrier for nurses aspiring to become entrepreneurs (11, 12). Conversely, entrepreneurial nurses argue that their training was predominantly based on traditional nursing teaching methods and did not provide them with adequate knowledge about entrepreneurship (12, 13). Therefore, developing and institutionalizing entrepreneurial skills among graduates can be essential for higher education (14).

A study in Thailand (2020) on entrepreneurial abilities and teaching-learning strategies to promote them among nursing students categorized entrepreneurial abilities among students into two primary areas: 1) interpersonal or soft skills, and 2) work or hard skills. Soft skills include creative thinking, a positive attitude, hard work and patience, leadership, vision, and problem-solving. Hard skills encompass business management knowledge and skills, risk acceptance, and information technology skills. The researchers recommended integrating these skills into the nursing students' curriculum and educational programs (15). Rapid transformations in the healthcare system have created significant opportunities for nurses possessing creativity, innovation, and business acumen to become entrepreneurs (16).

Today, health is one of the most critical factors influencing social welfare and development, with nurses receiving special attention as integral components. Rapid changes in the healthcare system, especially in recent years and with the spread of COVID-19, have imposed a significant workload on this professional group (17, 18).

Nurses are a fundamental pillar of the health system with a comprehensive care approach, having a substantial impact on healthcare effectiveness and playing a crucial role in health promotion, disease

prevention, treatment, and care. The significance of nurses' contributions to health system investments and improving societal economic growth is undeniable.

The lack of awareness regarding nursing capabilities has resulted in minimal nurse representation as service providers at the community level. Most officials and practitioners primarily focus on secondary prevention, specifically clinical hospital care, with limited attention to other prevention levels and service delivery environments in society (19). Nursing entrepreneurship, or nurses with entrepreneurial motivations, can provide opportunities for professionals to pursue innovative ideas and approaches to improve health outcomes (20).

The platforms and opportunities created during the COVID-19 pandemic have generated unprecedented conditions for cultivating entrepreneurial potential among nurses who demonstrate creativity, innovation, and business acumen. This study aimed to review and summarize the main characteristics of nursing entrepreneurship, including its concept, barriers, and opportunities in the global context.

2- MATERIALS AND METHODS

2-1. Data sources

In this overview, a data search was conducted using the electronic databases of Medline (via PubMed), Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, ProQuest, CIVILICA, and Google Scholar search engine up to March 15, 2023. The following keywords were used alone or in combination: "nursing entrepreneurship", "nursing entrepreneurial", "barriers of nursing entrepreneurship", "opportunities of nursing entrepreneurship", "nurses", and "nursing students" and their Persian equivalents. The search was performed independently and in duplicate by two

reviewers, with any disagreements resolved by the supervisor.

2-2. Inclusion and Exclusion criteria

This overview included reviews (scoping, narrative, and rapid reviews) and systematic reviews (with or without meta-analysis) that focused specifically on nursing entrepreneurship and its barriers and opportunities. Review studies available in full text, published in Persian or English, were considered for inclusion. The exclusion criterion was entrepreneurship studies outside the nursing field.

2-3. Data collection process

A researcher-developed form was created as a template and used consistently for each study. Two reviewers independently collected the data, and a third reviewer resolved any discrepancies.

3-RESULTS

A total of seven studies, comprising five reviews and two systematic reviews published between 2000 and 2023, were selected. The main characteristics of the selected studies are summarized as follows:

1. A systematic review (2013-2022, n=30 articles) aimed to examine the methodology, scope, and bibliometric analysis of studies on nursing entrepreneurship, their country origins, and entrepreneurship types. The results revealed that the literature predominantly focused on opportunities and obstacles facing entrepreneurial nurses. Nurse entrepreneurship received insufficient attention in both practice and research. Despite the limited number of studies, the findings provided several insights into the necessity of reconsidering nurses' entrepreneurial roles. Studies demonstrate that nurses' potential in the health sector remains under recognized, despite nursing being a fundamental profession within

healthcare. A comprehensive re-evaluation is required for new job descriptions and employment opportunities that align with the profession's evolving roles. From this perspective, nurses should not be viewed merely as healthcare workforce, but as potential participants in the new and competitive health industry across various entrepreneurship dimensions (21).

2. A systematic review (2020, n=37 articles) aimed to explore the primary characteristics of entrepreneurial nursing. The results revealed that the employment status of entrepreneurial nurses significantly influences their activities, challenges, and motivations. Entrepreneurial nurses are substantially impacted by the support they receive and the challenges they encounter within the healthcare system. Understanding the characteristics of entrepreneurial nurses is crucial for nurse managers, as they guide employees who may potentially become nurse entrepreneurs or nurse intrapreneurs (22).

3. A review (2023, n=13 articles) aimed to investigate nurses' engagement in entrepreneurship. The results revealed that nurses initiate their ventures for diverse reasons, including financial gain, career advancement, personal fulfillment, and professional autonomy. Their self-efficacy, perceived barriers, and social support significantly influence their perception of entrepreneurial opportunities. By harnessing nurses' entrepreneurial spirit, innovative solutions can be developed to address the evolving challenges in the healthcare industry. This approach enables nurses to pursue entrepreneurial ambitions while maintaining their commitment to delivering high-quality patient care (23).

4. A review (2000-2021) aimed to summarize the data in the field of nursing entrepreneurship. The results revealed that entrepreneurial nurses require personal, interpersonal, commercial, and strategic skills. They can operate as social, business,

and inter-organizational entrepreneurs. However, entrepreneurial nurses consistently encounter personal, sociocultural, academic, and organizational challenges, necessitating internal and external stimuli to overcome these barriers (24).

5. A narrative review (2011-2021, n=11) aimed to identify the hindering and supporting factors for nurses in entrepreneurship. The results revealed seven hindering factors: fear, lack of knowledge and skills, prior working culture experience, decision-making policies and regulations, health insurance limitations, colleague jealousy, and unprofessional attitudes. Additionally, two supporting factors were identified: knowledge and skills, and the ability to seek opportunities (25).

6. A review (2020, n=8 articles) aimed to explore the development of entrepreneurship in nursing. The results revealed that obstacles faced by nurse entrepreneurs primarily stem from a lack of entrepreneurial knowledge, experience, and skills. Moreover, establishing trust between colleagues and partners is crucial in identifying and addressing barriers to entrepreneurship. The key to developing nursing entrepreneurship lies in enhancing nurses' interest, knowledge, skills, training, and professional experience (26).

7. A review (2019, n=31) aimed to examine the concept and typology of entrepreneurship in nursing within national and international literature. The results revealed that the concept of nursing entrepreneurship is intrinsically linked to personal and professional characteristics, including autonomy, independence, flexibility, innovation, proactivity, self-confidence, and professional responsibility. The study identified three primary entrepreneurship typologies: social entrepreneurship as a mechanism for social mobilization and transformation, entrepreneurship characterized by nurses'

professional autonomy, and intrapreneurship related to corporate entrepreneurial activities (27).

4- DISCUSSION

This overview aims to review and summarize the main characteristics of nursing entrepreneurship, exploring its concept, barriers, and opportunities. The review of existing studies revealed that nursing entrepreneurship is fundamentally associated with personal and professional characteristics, including autonomy, independence, flexibility, innovation, proactivity, self-confidence, and professional responsibility.

The research identified seven significant hindering factors for nursing entrepreneurship: fear, limited knowledge and skills, prior working culture experience, restrictive decision-making policies and regulations, health insurance constraints, colleague jealousy, and unprofessional attitudes. Conversely, two critical supporting factors were recognized: comprehensive knowledge and skills, and the ability to identify and pursue entrepreneurial opportunities.

Entrepreneurship in nursing offers substantial opportunities for nurses, encompassing diverse services such as palliative/home care, nursing counseling, caregiver training, and physiotherapy services, among others (26). By creating entrepreneurial pathways, nurses can significantly increase the profession's visibility and develop innovative professional spaces (27). However, studies consistently demonstrate that nurses' potential in the healthcare sector remains underrecognized (20).

The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor's 2019 evaluation revealed that Iran ranks 178th out of 190 countries in business startup rates, indicating that entrepreneurship and its associated skills are not receiving sufficient attention in

society, particularly within higher education systems (28).

Entrepreneurship is a dynamic process involving the identification, evaluation, and exploitation of opportunities, along with introducing innovative products to the market through organized efforts. There is a widespread consensus that entrepreneurship significantly contributes to economic development, enhancing competition, driving innovation, and generating employment across various economies. This phenomenon has expanded substantially in recent decades, propelled by economic developments, technological innovations, and globalization (29).

In certain cultural contexts, nursing entrepreneurship is frequently characterized as private work, independent practice, or self-employment, wherein a nurse is considered the owner of a business providing nursing services across domains such as care, education, research, administration, or consulting with a direct service approach (30). However, a 2018 study highlighted the limited entrepreneurial engagement of nurses, revealing that they represented merely a 6% share of entrepreneurship compared to other healthcare professions like medicine and physiotherapy (9).

Teaching entrepreneurship skills is crucial in cultivating the foundation for emerging entrepreneurs (31). Entrepreneurs play a pivotal role in promoting employment and enhancing the economic status of societies. Entrepreneurship training and increased entrepreneurial activities can serve as potent stimuli for societal growth and development, potentially leading to increased income and improved quality of life.

Social and economic planners across various countries are committed to promoting and expanding entrepreneurship through educational systems, with a

particular focus on higher education (32, 33). Despite this commitment, nursing entrepreneurship continues to encounter significant challenges (26). The entrepreneurial landscape is inherently complex, characterized by both challenges and opportunities, requiring nurses to navigate these professionally (25).

The recent COVID-19 pandemic presented an unprecedented opportunity for nurses to explore entrepreneurial ventures. To succeed, nurses must proactively develop their potential, critically identify potential obstacles and support mechanisms, and strategically position themselves to operate their businesses competently and effectively.

Based on the review of existing studies, nursing entrepreneurship is characterized by seven significant hindering factors and two supporting factors. The hindering factors include fear, limited knowledge and skills, prior working culture experience, restrictive decision-making policies and regulations, health insurance constraints, colleague jealousy, and unprofessional attitudes. The supporting factors are enhanced knowledge and skills and the ability to seek and identify opportunities (25).

A 2021 study on nursing entrepreneurship development revealed that obstacles for entrepreneurial nurses primarily stem from insufficient entrepreneurial knowledge, experience, and skills. Researchers proposed strategic approaches to overcome these challenges, including increasing entrepreneurial knowledge and experience, identifying opportunities through digital platforms like the Internet and social media, and facilitating interaction between entrepreneurs, patients, and the community to discover and develop entrepreneurial opportunities (34).

Jahani et al. (2014) conducted a qualitative study exploring entrepreneurial motivations among Iranian nurses. Their

data analysis revealed five primary motivational themes: professional promotion, serving society, spiritual achievements, earning more money, and creating employment (35). Multiple studies have identified diverse motivations for nurses becoming entrepreneurs, including the desire to be one's own boss, need for a flexible work schedule, ability to pursue personal ideas, financial gain, career progression, personal fulfillment, and professional autonomy (23, 36, 37).

Recognizing that nurses have multifaceted needs in their entrepreneurial roles, researchers emphasize the importance of identifying and addressing their challenges while providing a supportive foundation for creative activities that can ultimately meet broader societal health needs (24). This approach requires understanding the complex motivational landscape that drives nurses toward entrepreneurial pursuits.

Historically, researchers believed entrepreneurial traits like determination and creativity were inherent and unchangeable. However, contemporary evidence demonstrates that entrepreneurial capabilities can be acquired and cultivated through targeted educational programs. This shift suggests that developing and institutionalizing entrepreneurial skills among graduates should be a key objective in higher education, especially given that university education no longer guarantees employment in the 21st century (38, 14, 39).

Choosing the entrepreneurial path, taking risks, and confronting numerous challenges require robust motivation and strong driving factors. Research findings consistently demonstrate that material incentives alone are insufficient to attract and retain nurses in entrepreneurial roles.

Jahani et al.'s study revealed that immaterial and higher-order motivational factors—such as professional promotion,

societal service, and spiritual achievements—are crucial for nurses to overcome obstacles in entrepreneurship (35). These intrinsic motivations provide the resilience necessary to navigate the complex entrepreneurial landscape.

Additional studies highlight that nursing entrepreneurship offers significant benefits, including enhanced quality of care and increased job satisfaction (40). Conversely, reduced nurse motivation, compounded by personal challenges, can lead to destructive societal health impacts and substantial capital loss (41-43). This underscores the importance of understanding and supporting nurses' motivational dynamics in entrepreneurial contexts.

Entrepreneurship offers nurses opportunities to pursue innovative approaches that improve health outcomes by leveraging their personal perspectives and professional insights (38). A meta-analysis of 41 articles demonstrated that entrepreneurial motivations are positively and significantly correlated with the selection of entrepreneurial strategies (39), with individuals exhibiting high entrepreneurial motivation being more likely to become entrepreneurs (44). Experts emphasize the critical need for comprehensive support from professional organizations and health authorities to create conducive environments for nursing entrepreneurship.

To cultivate future entrepreneurial nurses, educational institutions must strategically integrate entrepreneurship knowledge, skills, and cultural understanding into their curricula. Specifically, developing nurses' entrepreneurial capacities should begin during their vocational training, enabling students to build foundational skills and mindsets that will support their future innovative healthcare endeavors (45). This approach ensures that emerging healthcare professionals are equipped with the necessary tools to transform their

professional expertise into entrepreneurial opportunities.

5- CONCLUSION

A comprehensive review of seven systematic studies published between 2000 and 2023 reveals that nursing entrepreneurship is intrinsically linked to personal and professional characteristics, including autonomy, independence, flexibility, innovation, proactivity, self-confidence, and professional responsibility. Despite the sector's potential, nurses' capabilities remain underrecognized, even though entrepreneurship offers promising opportunities such as palliative/home care, nursing counseling, caregiver training, and physiotherapy services.

The existing evidence identifies seven significant barriers to nursing entrepreneurship: fear, limited knowledge and skills, prior working culture experience, restrictive decision-making policies, health insurance constraints, colleague jealousy, and unprofessional attitudes. Conversely, two supporting factors emerge: comprehensive knowledge and skills, and the ability to identify entrepreneurial opportunities. Entrepreneurial nurses must develop personal, interpersonal, commercial, and strategic competencies. Overcoming obstacles—primarily stemming from insufficient entrepreneurial knowledge, experience, and skills—requires a multifaceted approach. The key to developing nursing entrepreneurship lies in enhancing nurses' interest, knowledge, skills, training, and professional experience, supported by internal and external motivational stimuli.

6- AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Study conception or design: NM and KS; Data analyzing and draft manuscript preparation: VZ, MA, AA, and MG; Critical revision of the paper: MG; Supervision of the research: NM

and KS; Final approval of the version to be published: NM, MA, VZ, AA, MG, and KS.

7- CONFLICT OF INTEREST: None.

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