

## ALL UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC DISSERTATIONS SHOULD BE PUBLISHED AS SCHOLARLY ARTICLES

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**Keywords:** academic dissertations, thesis, publishing, scholarly publishing, journal article

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Undergraduate students are often required to produce an academic dissertation (thesis). Such a dissertation should showcase that a student has acquired various important skills, including the ability to define a topic area, use academic writing, structure work, and study literature in-depth in a given field. Undergraduate academic dissertations may include original research or be based on a literature review (1).

In Croatia, most higher education institutions providing nursing studies allow students to choose between a research-based and review-based dissertation. In 2020/2021, Marendic et al. examined attitudes and factors influencing the choice of thesis type (original research versus review) among Croatian nursing students (2). This survey of 912 students indicated that mentor encouragement, knowledge, and sense of ability to conduct research were positively associated with the score on the Students' Attitudes Toward Research (SAR) questionnaire. The expectation that a research-based thesis will extend the study duration was negatively associated with the SAR score. A higher SAR score was associated with a higher likelihood of selecting a research-based thesis. The study indicated that modifiable factors were associated with the choice of conducting a research-based thesis among nursing students (2).

While that study explored students' intentions, an analysis of defended undergraduate dissertations can provide insight into real-life decisions of health sciences students regarding the type of academic dissertations they chose to conduct. Furthermore, although disser-

tations include creation of new knowledge, they remain grey literature, i.e., literature that is not published in scholarly journals (3). Thus, it would be important if the content of academic dissertations was disseminated into scientific literature.

In 2022 and 2023, the Master of Nursing thesis by Kristina Kraljić analyzed the type of academic dissertations conducted by health sciences students in Croatia and the number of them published in a scholarly journal. The analysis involved all eligible dissertations that were included in the online National Repository of Bachelor and Master Dissertations (Croatian: *Nacionalni repozitorij završnih i diplomskih radova ZIR*) by May 2022 (4).

Of 10,668 eligible dissertations, we analyzed 9,861 that could be accessed. Namely, many dissertations included in the ZIR are not publicly accessible, and some of the institutions involved did not give their consent to access them. The selected sample included 81 % Bachelor dissertations and 19 % Master dissertations. All but 21 dissertations were written in the Croatian language. Among the Bachelor dissertations, 21 % were based on original research, compared to 66 % among the Master dissertations. Most dissertations based on research included cross-sectional studies. By combining a survey of mentors and literature search, we found that the contents of only 2.8 % of the dissertations were published as scholarly articles. The majority of those articles (83 %) were published in Croatian journals (4). When asked about the reasons why the content of a dissertation was not published as a scholarly

article, most mentors indicated a lack of interest among students and insufficient quality of the dissertations (4).

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that very few academic dissertations of health sciences students were published as scholarly articles. This is detrimental for society, but also for students, mentors, and institutions. Namely, original contributions contained in a number of dissertations often remain hidden within the national repository and the Croatian language. It is not very likely that those searching for novel information will search national repositories of dissertations. Thus, academic dissertations remain grey literature, accessible to a very limited audience.

Writing a scholarly article is another academic skill that can be a useful part of university training. By publishing articles from academic dissertations, mentors could be advancing biomedical sciences, as well as their pragmatic criteria for academic advancement. Scientometric indicators of institutions rely on publications, and thus dissertations that are not published as scholarly articles remain a missing opportunity for institutions.

Therefore, academic institutions should invest more effort into enabling and motivating students and mentors to not only conduct original research within academic dissertations, but also to raise awareness about the importance of publishing the content of those dissertations as articles in scholarly journals.

## Declarations

## Consent for publication

Not applicable

## Availability of data and materials

Not applicable

## Competing interests

The author does not have any competing interests related to this work.

## Funding

The author did not obtain any extramural funding to support this work.

## Author contributions

Livia Puljak is the sole author of this article.

## Acknowledgments

The study described in this editorial was conducted as part of the Master of Nursing thesis by Kristina Kraljić. The thesis was written and defended in the Croatian language.

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