## RESEARCH

# ANALYSIS OF THE DISSERTATIONS AND THESES OF THE GRADUATE NURSING PROGRAM OF UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DA PARAÍBA

ANÁLISE DAS DISSERTAÇÕES E TESES DO PROGRAMA DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM ENFERMAGEM DA UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DA PARAÍBA

ANÁLISIS DE LAS DISERTACIONES Y TESIS DEL PROGRAMA DE POSGRADO EN ENFERMERÍA DE LA UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DA PARAÍBA

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Objective: to analyze the thematic and methodological trend of the dissertations and theses of the Graduate Nursing Program of the Universidade Federal da Paraíba. Method: descriptive and documentary study performed by analyzing theses and dissertations defended from 2008 to 2016. Results: a total of 162 dissertations and 26 theses were defended, with higher prevalence of descriptive studies with qualitative approach, in the research line on Policies and Practices in Health and Nursing and in the thematic area of Nursing in Adult and Elderly Health, and the most frequent study scenario was the hospital. The semi-structured interview technique was the most used, with data analysis through statistical analysis softwares. It was found that the Basic Theory of Human Needs was the most used. Conclusion: there has been a greater scientific deepening of the Nursing science, with the consolidation of new research lines and, consequently, new perspectives and knowledge are built and widespread in the scientific community. Keywords: Nursing; Nursing Research; Study Characteristics; Education, Nursing, Education, Nursing, Graduate.

#### **RESUMO**

Objetivo: analisar a tendência temática e metodológica das dissertações e teses do programa de pós-graduação em Enfermagem da Universidade Federal da Paraíba. Método: estudo descritivo e documental, mediante a análise das teses e dissertações defendidas entre 2008 e 2016. Resultados: foram defendidas 162 dissertações e 26 teses, havendo maior prevalência de estudos descritivos, com abordagem qualitativa, na linha de pesquisa de Políticas e Práticas em Saúde e Enfermagem e na área temática de Enfermagem em Saúde do Adulto e Idoso, tendo o hospital como cenário mais frequente. A técnica de entrevista semiestruturada foi a mais utilizada, com análise dos dados por meio de softwares de análise estatística. Evidenciou-se que a teoria das necessidades humanas básicas foi a mais utilizada. Conclusão: verificou-se maior aprofundamento científico da ciência da Enfermagem, com a consolidação de novas linhas de pesquisa e, assim, novas perspectivas e saberes são construídos e difundidos na comunidade científica.

Palavras-chave: Enfermagem; Pesquisa em Enfermagem; Características dos Estudos; Educação em Enfermagem; Educação de Pós-Graduação em Enfermagem.

#### RESUMEN

Objetivo: analizar la tendencia temática y metodológica de las disertaciones y tesis del Programa de Posgrado en Enfermería de la Universidade Federal da Paraíba. Método: estudio descriptivo y documental mediante el análisis de tesis y disertaciones defendidas entre 2008 y 2016. Resultados: se defendieron 162 disertaciones y 26 tesis en total, con mayor prevalencia de estudios descriptivos, de enfoque cualitativo, en la línea de investigación de Políticas y Prácticas en Salud y Enfermería y en temas vinculados a Enfermería en Salud del Adulto y del Adulto Mayor; principalmente realizadas en el hospital. La técnica de entrevista semiestructurada fue la más utilizada, con análisis de datos a través de programas de análisis estadístico. La Teoría de las Necesidades Humanas Básicas fue la más utilizada. Conclusión: se observó mayor profundización científica de la ciencia de Enfermería, con la consolidación de nuevas líneas de investigación y, de este modo, nuevas perspectivas y conocimientos son construidos y difundidos de en la comunidad científica.

Palabras clave: Enfermería; Investigación en Enfermería; Características de los Estudios; Educación en Enfermería; Educación de Posgrado en Enfermería.

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#### INTRODUCTION

The globalization process is a worldwide phenomenon that aims to bring people together around the world through the dissemination of information and communication.<sup>1</sup> The technological and scientific advance of several areas emerges from the need to socialize information and knowledge in real time. In the field of nursing, such development followed the worldwide trend towards innovation of communication systems and new technologies, considering the improvement of health actions and the development of scientific knowledge of the profession.<sup>2</sup>

In this sense, the graduate program has a fundamental role in the development of nursing science, considering that the Masters and PhD courses developed by the graduate programs have objectives that converge to a broader and deeper training, which allows the production of qualified human resources, consolidating scientific knowledge to performance in professional practice.<sup>3</sup>

In Brazil, the graduate program was instituted by the Law for National Education Guidelines and Bases in 1961 and was approved by the Federal Education Council only in 1965.<sup>4</sup> The nursing graduate program was implanted in 1972, with the creation of the first Masters course of the Escola de Enfermagem Anna Nery. Subsequently, in 1982, the first PhD program in Nursing began at the Universidade de São Paulo, which stood out for being the first PhD course in Latin America.<sup>5</sup>

The creation of national postgraduate courses has favored scientific evolution and promoted the development of nursing science and the construction of the scientific *habitus* of Brazilian Nursing. Nonetheless, it is imperative that teachers who graduate from graduate courses, at Master and PhD levels, work in the undergraduate courses, qualifying higher education.<sup>3</sup> The expansion of nursing graduate programs at the national level has occurred in a gradual way, so that in 2014 there were 34 graduate programs at the doctoral level.<sup>5</sup>

An important aspect is that, although the evolution of graduate programs is a national reality, its distribution does not occur equally among the regions of the country, since the Southeast region had, by 2014, around 50% of all programs, while the Northeast region presented only 21.9% of the national total.<sup>5</sup> However, even though inequalities exist in the development of national graduate programs, it should be pointed out that, in terms of scientific production, Brazil rose from 17<sup>th</sup> in 2005 to the 6<sup>th</sup> place in 2012 in the ranking of the Scopus/SCImago database, which evidences the scientific evolution of Brazilian nursing.<sup>6</sup>

In Paraíba, the Nursing graduation program began with the creation of an Academic Masters course in Nursing at the Universidade Federal da Paraíba (UFPB), however, its activities began only in 1979. Subsequently, in 2011, the Academic Doctorate course was created. Nowadays, the Nursing graduate program (PPGENF) has offered courses in the area of "Nursing and Health Care", having been evaluated by the Coordena-

ção de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES) with grade 4.6

The purpose of this program is to develop critical thinking based on the established training of scientists, especially in the Northeast region, with the purpose of inserting scientific representation in the national and international context, based on research in the area of Nursing and Health, with views to the production of knowledge that provides the improvement of the quality of life of individuals and the reduction of social inequalities.<sup>7</sup>

In view of the above, no studies were found addressing the scientific production of Nursing graduate programs in the local and regional context. In this sense, the present study is justified since the findings will serve as a subsidy for the critical reflection on the scientific production of researches of the national graduate programs, especially in the local and regional scenario. Thus, the present study aimed to analyze the thematic and methodological trend of the dissertations and theses of the Nursing graduate program of the Universidade Federal da Paraíba.

### **METHOD**

This is a descriptive and documentary study through the analysis of the dissertations and theses defended in the Nursing graduate program of the UFPB. Although the activities of this program started in 1979, only the dissertations defended from the year 2008 began to be made available for access in the Electronic Theses and Dissertations Publication System (TEDE in Portuguese),8 while the theses were made available from the year 2014, since the Academic Doctorate course was created only in 2011.

All the dissertations and theses that were available for access in the TEDE, comprising the period between January 2008 and December 2016, totaling 188 files, were included in the study. Data collection took place between January and February 2017, with a complete reading of each manuscript and a structured script containing the following variables for the study: year of defense, methodological approach, research line, thematic research area, study scenario, type of study, data collection and analysis technique and theoretical or methodological framework used. The data were organized in a spread-sheet built in the Microsoft Excel 2016 Program and analyzed through descriptive statistics.

This research was not submitted to the Ethics Committee because the collection of the Universidade Federal da Paraíba is in the public domain. However, all precepts related to copyright legislation, as established by Law No. 9.610/1998, have been complied with, in which the authors of the dissertations authorize the UFPB to make available, without reimbursement of copyright, the work in electronic means through the World Computer Network, in order to provide the dissemination of the scientific production generated by the University.

#### RESULTS

In the period between 2008 and 2016, 162 dissertations and 26 theses were defended. The majority of the students of the PPGENF/UFPB are graduated in Nursing (n = 149), among whom 17 have a second graduation. There are also professionals with other backgrounds, such as Physiotherapy, Medicine, Biological Sciences, Psychology and Nutrition. As shown in Table 1, most of the studies focused on the qualitative methodological approach (46.3%), in the research line of Policies and Practices in Health and Nursing (40.4%) and in the thematic area of Nursing in Adult and Elderly Health (26.1%).

Table 1 - Distribution of dissertations and theses according to the methodological approach, research line and thematic area

Variable	n	%
Methodological Approach		
Qualitative	87	46.3
Quantitative-qualitative	57	30.3
Quantitative	21	11.2
Uninformed	23	12.2
Research line		
Policies and Practices in Health and Nursing	76	40.4
Theoretical-Philosophical Foundations of Caring in Health and Nursing	53	28.2
Nursing in Adult and Elderly Health	37	19.7
Epidemiology and Health	14	7.4
Nursing in Health Care	8	4.3
Thematic area		
Nursing in Adult and Elderly Health	49	26.1
Nursing in Collective Health	38	20.2
Systematization of Nursing Care	26	13.8
Nursing in Child and Adolescent Health	18	9.6
Nursing in Mental Health	15	8.0
Nursing in Palliative Care	12	6.4
Nursing in Women's Health	8	4.3
Nursing in Occupational Health	7	3.7
Nursing in Men's Health	6	3.2
Nursing Education	4	2.1
Theoretical-Philosophical Foundations of Nursing	4	2.1

Source: research data, 2017.

The most used scenario in the studies was the hospital (27.1%), especially the Hospital Universitário Lauro Wanderley (HULW/UFPB) and the Estratégia Saúde da Família (25.5%). Regarding the type of study, there was a higher frequency of descriptive (35.1%) and exploratory (31.9%) surveys, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 - Distribution of dissertations and theses according to the type of study, study scenario and data collection and analysis techniques

Variable	n	%
Study scenario		
Hospital	51	27.1
Family Health Strategy	48	25.5
County	29	15.4
Specialized service	27	14.4
Educational Institutions	8	4.3
Database	7	3.7
Long-Term Institution for the Elderly	7	3.7
Others	11	3.2
Type of study		
Descriptive	66	35.1
Exploratory	60	31.9
Cross-sectional	26	13.8
Methodological	24	12.8
Qualitative	13	6.9
Evaluative	11	5.9
Epidemiological	10	5.3
Comprehensive	7	3.7
Interpretative	7	3.7
Documentary	6	3.2
Oral history	5	2.7
Integrative Review	4	2.1
Others	28	14.9

Source: research data, 2017.

According to Table 3, the most used data collection techniques were the semi-structured interview (34.0%) and the structured questionnaire (29.8%). In relation to the data analysis, there was a higher prevalence of statistical analysis software (33.0%) and of the precepts established by a theory (24.5%).

Table 3 - Distribution of dissertations and theses according to techniques for data collection and analysis

Variable	n	%
Data collection		
Semi-structured interview	64	34.0
Structured questionnaire	56	29.8
Multi-method technique	46	24.5
Specific scale	34	18.1
Oral history	14	7.4
Free-word association technique	12	6.4
Adapted form	8	4.3
Focus group	6	3.2
Others	17	9.0

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Table 3 - Distribution of dissertations and theses according to techniques for data collection and analysis

Variable	n	%
Data analysis		
Statistical analysis software	62	33.0
Theory	46	24.5
Content analysis technique	36	19.1
Thematic analysis	28	14.9
Text analysis software	20	10.6
Discourse analysis	13	6.9
Others	8	4.3

Source: research data, 2017.

Among the theses and dissertations analyzed, 46 used theories to provide theoretical or methodological background to the studies, of which the Wanda Aguiar Horta's theory of basic human needs (37.0%) and Moscovici's theory of social representations (32.6%) were the most frequent, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4 - Distribution of dissertations and theses according to the theoretical or methodological background used

Theoretical or methodological background	n	%
Theory of basic human needs	17	37.0
Theory of social representations	15	32.6
Humanistic nursing theory	3	6.5
Data-based theory	2	4.3
Others	9	19.6
Total	46	100.0

Source: research data, 2017.

#### **DISCUSSION**

There was higher prevalence in the number of dissertations in relation to academic theses. This difference is related to the creation of the PPGENF/UFPB, since the Masters level was established through Resolution no. 204/77 of the University Council of the UFPB, with activities starting in 1979. Only in 2011 a new regulation was approved, with Resolution no. 26/2011 authorizing the creation of the Doctoral course. In addition, the relationship between dissertations and theses is directly proportional to the number of Master's and Doctor's degrees in Nursing offered in Brazil, with predominance of Master's, academic or professional courses (72 courses) on doctoral courses (37 courses).

The qualitative methodological approach was the most used (46.3%), which corroborates the national and international trend towards knowledge production in nursing. A study conducted at the Universidade Católica Portuguesa and the Instituto de Ciências Biomédicas da Universidade do Porto identified a higher frequency

of qualitative approach in dissertations (58.6%) and theses (46.3%) defended.<sup>10</sup> There has been a significant increase in qualitative research in the field of health sciences in the last four decades, surpassing its original field in Social Sciences. This fact can be verified in the electronic databases of scientific literature, especially in Brazilian, North American, Canadian and some European countries.<sup>11</sup>

In health, Nursing pioneered qualitative studies, becoming, over the years, an important national reference in several areas. The dissertations and theses have been developed with great influence of a phenomenological, ethnographic nature, among others, which makes it possible to understand the human being in its complexity and depth, as well as in the healthcare process, which favors the development of studies with a qualitative approach.<sup>11</sup>

The research lines offered by the program are concentrated in the Nursing and Health Care area, and among them, the research line Policies and Practices in Health and Nursing (40.4%) stood out among the analyzed studies. Accordingly, research carried out in the graduate program in Nursing at the Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro highlighted a percentage of 36.2% in the research line Knowledge, Policies and Practices in Health.<sup>12</sup>

These findings are in accordance with the National Agenda for Priorities in Health Research, instituted by the Ministério da Saúde (BR) in the year 2008. Thus, there has been a major change in the priorities of nursing studies, aiming at the identification of new aspects inherent to the great problems faced in the current Brazilian health scenario, with nursing care as the theoretical subsidy category.<sup>13</sup>

The establishment of areas or fields of research as priorities in nursing refers to the need for adjustments in studies, aiming to seek what is essential as profession, discipline and science. It provides visibility to the knowledge that has been constituted and perfected over the years, such as care, the subjects that are the targets of this care, professional competencies and health problems that affect not only nursing, but the entire Brazilian health.<sup>13</sup>

On the thematic areas, Nursing in Adult and Elderly Health (26.1%) and Nursing in Collective Health (20.2%) were more representative. A similar study carried out in the Nursing Master's program of the graduate program of the Universidade Federal da Paraná/Brazil found a greater focus on the production of works in these two areas.<sup>14</sup>

The interest in studying the aspects related to adult and elderly health results from the increase in the life expectancy and the need for more care to these individuals, mainly due to the high number of noncommunicable chronic diseases, which are more prevalent in those age groups, <sup>15</sup> requiring research that produces new knowledge to meet the particularities of this group.

As for the area of collective health, this result may be related to the expansion of the strategies of the Sistema Único de Saúde in the country, with highlight to the Estratégia de Saúde da Família (ESF), which has become an important field of professional insertion of nurs-

es, making it attractive to research. This proves that the FHS (25.5%) is one of the most used scenarios for conducting research in PPGENF.

The hospital (27.1%) was the most used place of study, diverging from research conducted with dissertations and theses of Brazilian Nursing graduate programs. <sup>16</sup> The HULW/UFPB is a scenario explored by students of the program, both for ease of access and for the wealth of information that becomes a subsidy for studies. It is an important source for the generation of new knowledge, involving the investigation of specific themes and contents related to epidemiology, diagnosis and treatment of diseases.

Federal university hospitals have the objective of promoting teaching, research and extension through the health care of the population, being institutions whose management is subordinate to its corresponding Federal University, to the Ministério da Educação e Cultura (BR), due to its dimension of education, and to the Ministério da Saúde (BR), because it is linked to the public health system.<sup>17</sup> They are extremely relevant to the health system due to the development of some fundamental activities, such as the training of new professionals, creation and use of new knowledge and products and the provision of a wide range of services for the population, <sup>18,19</sup> which often makes them a reference to surrounding cities and nearby states.

Regarding the type of study, the descriptive (35.1%) and exploratory (31.9%) surveys were the most present, corroborating the findings of other studies.<sup>5,20</sup> Descriptive studies show the particularities, characteristics and profiles of people, groups, communities, objects, processes or certain phenomena that the researcher wants to submit to an analysis, being useful to accurately display the most varied angles or dimensions that involve a phenomenon, event, community, context or situation.<sup>21</sup>

In relation to the exploratory studies, these have as objective the detailed analysis of a topic, phenomenon or research problem still little studied, serving as source for familiarization of the researcher to obtain information, being very used in the research.<sup>21</sup> In the investigated studies, there was a frequent use of the combination of exploratory and descriptive studies, aiming to obtain an expanded view about the complexity that involved the discussed themes, since the use of only one type of study would not contemplate the objectives proposed for the research.

The semi-structured interviews (34.0%) were the most applied data collection technique, based on a previously elaborated script of themes or questions, but allowing the researcher to ask new questions to obtain more information or to deepen the discussion about the desired topics. Through the use of this technique, the rhythm and the structure of the interview are shared, and the interpretation of the meaning is attributed to the speeches surrounded by countless facets related to the individual and to the social context in which they are inserted.<sup>21</sup> Through interviews, the researcher has access to social realities, starting from a conversation aimed at gathering infor-

mation about an object of study and, with this, obtains reflections of the subject on the reality he/she experiences.<sup>22</sup>

Regarding data analysis, there was a higher prevalence of statistical analysis software (33.0%), which have been increasingly used for the resolution of several applications in different areas of knowledge. The available software have been used both in academia, in industries, banks, public departments, among other sectors.<sup>23</sup>

Still in relation to the analysis, the use of theories as a form of theoretical contribution and as a means of interpretation of the obtained results stood out, based on its established precepts. The theories served as a basis to serve different purposes, among them to evaluate the applicability of theory to practice, teaching and administration in nursing. Its use must validate or refute the proposals, which can be done, progressively, with each one of its components.<sup>23</sup>

The theory of the basic human needs of Wanda Aguiar Horta (37.0%) and the theory of social representations of Moscovici (32.6%) the most used. The former is a nursing theory and employs aspects such as philosophy, propositions, concepts, definitions and principles, scientifically grounding the practice. The concepts are abstract and general; the propositions derive from the concepts and express a fundamental truth to follow; principles are enunciated, provisionally admitted as unquestionable, but subject themselves to test and experimentation.<sup>24</sup>

The theory of social representations is characterized by a set of explanations that originate from the interindividual communications of daily life. They also provide methods of work and research that can be applied in several areas of scientific knowledge, allowing to address the historicity of space, its forms and its contents and classify, cut, understand the decontextualization of discourses and ideologies.<sup>25</sup>

The use of theories in nursing research reflects the search for autonomy for the development of care based on the theoretical, philosophical, practical and scientific principles of the profession, aiming at the consolidation of nursing, in the health area, as a profession, science and art.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Nursing has envisioned significant development of its science, its know-how and innovation of technologies for care, especially in recent years. This scientific development is mainly related to the growth and evolution of graduate programs, considering that the Masters and Doctoral courses aim to promote improvements in health care, grounded in qualification and reflections on the essence of nursing care and its importance for the health field.

The findings of this study show that there has been a broadening of PPGENF/UFPB, reflecting an increase in the availability of graduate courses in Paraíba. In addition, there has been a greater scientific deepening of nursing science, with the consolidation of new lines of research and, thus, the construction

of new perspectives and knowledge, being disseminated in the national and international scientific community.

There was a greater predominance of qualitative studies, possibly because nursing was the pioneer in health research with this type of approach. There was a prevalence of studies related to adult and elderly health. This could be related to the phenomenon of the demographic and epidemiological transition identified in the country, which led to a greater number of investigations that deal with aspects related to this theme.

Also, the studies developed by graduate students use theories to support care, especially nursing theories, which provides more development for nursing as a discipline, science and profession, besides enhancing its importance in the health area.

The study had as a limitation the fact the we did not find all the dissertations produced by the program, since only the manuscripts defended from the year 2008 are available in the University collection, however, the absence of these documents does not invalidate the presented results. Thus, it is opportune to ratify the relevance of PPGENF/UFPB for the production of highly qualified and reflective human resources, which contribute significantly to the scientific development of nursing.

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