

REFLECTIONS ON MIXED METHODS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE THEORY OF PRAXIS INTERVENTION OF NURSING IN COLLECTIVE HEALTH

REFLEXÕES ACERCA DOS MÉTODOS MISTOS NA PERSPECTIVA DA TEORIA DE INTERVENÇÃO PRÁXICA DE ENFERMAGEM EM SAÚDE COLETIVA

REFLEXIONES SOBRE LOS MÉTODOS MIXTOS DESDE LA PERSPECTIVA DE LA TEORÍA DE LA INTERVENCIÓN DE LA PRAXIS EN ENFERMERÍA DE SALUD PÚBLICA

 Jéssyca Slompo Freitas¹
 Rafaela Gessner Lourenço²
 Maria Marta Nolasco Chaves²

¹Universidade Estadual do Centro-Oeste – UNICENTRO, Departamento de Enfermagem. Guarapuava, PR – Brazil.

²Universidade Federal do Paraná – UFPR, Departamento de Enfermagem. Curitiba, PR -Brazil.

Corresponding Author: Jéssyca Slompo Freitas
E-mail: jessyca_sfreytas@hotmail.com

Authors' Contributions:

Conceptualization: Jéssyca S. Freitas, Rafaela G. Lourenço, Conceptualization: Jéssyca S. Freitas, Rafaela G. Lourenço, Maria M. N. Chaves; **Data Collection:** Jéssyca S. Freitas; Project Management: Jéssyca S. Freitas, Rafaela G. Lourenço, Maria M. N. Chaves; **Investigation:** Jéssyca S. Freitas; **Methodology:** Jéssyca S. Freitas, Rafaela G. Lourenço, Maria M. N. Chaves; **Software:** Jéssyca S. Freitas, Rafaela G. Lourenço, Maria M. N. Chaves; **Statistical Analysis:** Jéssyca S. Freitas, Rafaela G. Lourenço, Maria M. N. Chaves; **Supervision:** Jéssyca S. Freitas, Rafaela G. Lourenço, Maria M. N. Chaves; **Validation:** Jéssyca S. Freitas, Rafaela G. Lourenço, Maria M. N. Chaves; **Visualization:** Jéssyca S. Freitas, Rafaela G. Lourenço, Maria M. N. Chaves; **Writing – Original Draft Preparation:** Jéssyca S. Freitas, Rafaela G. Lourenço, Maria M. N. Chaves; **Writing – Review and Editing:** Jéssyca S. Freitas, Rafaela G. Lourenço, Maria M. N. Chaves.

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ABSTRACT

Objective: this study aims to present reflections on the development of a methodologically elaborated study with mixed methods in the theoretical perspective of Nursing in collective health. Its philosophical basis is Historical and Dialectical Materialism. The object of the study was the Social Determination of hospitalizations due to Ambulatory-Care Sensitive Conditions of adolescents in a health regional in a southern state of Brazil. **Method:** descriptive and reflective study, subdivided into three moments. The first deals with the theoretical and methodological foundations, with dialogues between the assumptions of mixed methods and the Theory of Praxis Intervention of Nursing in Public Health. In the second moment, the selection of procedures for the collection of quantitative and qualitative data is described, evidenced by the need to define the combination of these data in the sequence of the process, as well as to establish the weights of the data in the development of the analysis of the phenomenon. In the third moment, the integration of data is reflected, highlighting the combinations of information that occurred in the previous steps, as referred to by the method itself. **Result:** the study developed using mixed methods enhanced a critical analysis that, anchored in the assumptions of Public Health Nursing, allowed understanding the connections between the quantitative and qualitative data present in the historicity and dynamics of the object. **Final considerations:** the unprecedented intersection of these theoretical and methodological fields stands out to understand the phenomenon and propose effective actions to face the processes that determine it in its objective reality.

Keywords: Nursing Theory; Methodology; Nursing; Public Health.

RESUMO

Objetivo: este estudo tem o objetivo de apresentar reflexões sobre o desenvolvimento de um estudo metodologicamente elaborado com métodos mistos na perspectiva teórica da Enfermagem em saúde coletiva. Tem como base filosófica o Materialismo Histórico e Dialético. O objeto do estudo foi a Determinação Social das Internações por Condições Sensíveis à Atenção Primária de adolescentes em uma regional de saúde de um estado do Sul do Brasil. **Método:** estudo descritivo e do tipo reflexivo, subdividido em três momentos. O primeiro trata da fundamentação teórica e metodológica, com diálogos entre os pressupostos dos métodos mistos e a Teoria de Intervenção Prática da Enfermagem em Saúde Coletiva. No segundo momento, é descrita a seleção dos procedimentos para a coleta de dados quantitativos e qualitativos, evidenciado pela necessidade de definir a combinação desses dados na sequência do processo, assim como estabelecer os pesos dos dados no desenvolvimento da análise do fenômeno. No terceiro momento, reflete-se sobre a integração de dados, destacando as combinações das informações que ocorreram na etapa anterior, conforme referenda o próprio método. **Resultado:** o estudo desenvolvido por meio de métodos misto potencializou uma análise crítica, que, ancorada nos pressupostos da Enfermagem em Saúde Coletiva, permitiu compreender as conexões entre os dados quantitativos e qualitativos presentes na historicidade e na dinamicidade do objeto. **Considerações finais:** destaca-se o ineditismo da interseção desses campos teóricos e metodológicos para compreender o fenômeno e propor ações efetivas para o enfrentamento dos processos que o determinam na sua realidade objetiva.

Palavras-chave: Teoria de Enfermagem; Metodologia; Enfermagem; Saúde Coletiva.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: este estudio tiene como objetivo presentar reflexiones sobre el desarrollo en un estudio metodológicamente elaborado con métodos mixtos en la perspectiva teórica de la Enfermería de salud pública, que tiene como base filosófica el Materialismo Histórico y Dialéctico. El objeto de estudio fue la Determinación Social de Hospitalizaciones por Condiciones Sensibles a la Atención Primaria de adolescencia en un departamento regional de salud en un estado del sur de Brasil. **Método:** estudio descriptivo y del tipo reflexivo, subdividido en tres momentos, el primero de los cuales trata de la fundamentación teórica y metodológica con diálogos entre las premisas de los métodos mixtos y la Teoría de la Intervención Práctica de Enfermería en Salud Pública. El segundo momento describe la selección de procedimientos para la recolección de datos cuantitativos y cualitativos, evidenciada por la necesidad de definir la combinación de este en la secuencia del proceso, así como establecer los pesos de los datos en el desarrollo del análisis del fenómeno. El tercer momento reflexiona sobre la integración de los datos, destacando las combinaciones de informaciones ocurridas en el paso anterior, referenciadas por el propio método. **Resultados:** el estudio desarrollado a través de métodos mixtos potenció el análisis crítico que, anclada en los presupuestos de la enfermería de salud colectiva, permitió comprender las conexiones entre los datos cuantitativos y cualitativos presentes en la historicidad y dinamismo del objeto. **Conclusión:** destaca la novedad de la intersección de estos campos teóricos y metodológicos para comprender el fenómeno y proponer acciones eficaces para abordar los procesos que lo determinen en su realidad objetiva.

Palabras clave: Teoría de Enfermería; Metodología; Enfermería; Salud Pública.

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INTRODUCTION

The theoretical and methodological framework that outlines research is based on the worldview adopted to explore, understand, and analyze phenomena selected for the study. In Collective Health Nursing, the philosophical and theoretical assumptions are based on Dialectical and Historical Materialism (DHM), which postulates that it is necessary to understand the relationships that are established in society through the insertion of collectives in production and, based on this understanding, to comprehend the different ways of living in that reality⁽¹⁾.

In this perspective, from this knowledge, it is possible to explore and understand the different processes that are found in the determination of a phenomenon, being an abstract elaboration on the concrete reality. It is the processes related to economic and social organization that guarantee the relationship between production and consumption for life in a society. This knowledge allows reflection on the way of life of groups and individuals, as well as understanding the determination of individual and collective health⁽²⁾.

To analyze a phenomenon from the DHM perspective, it is necessary to delimit theoretical and methodological contributions that allow exploring the objective reality (OR) in its three dimensions — structural, particular, and singular —, in which the object and the subjective aspects related to it are found. To do so, it is necessary to previously demarcate the categories of analysis, according to the philosophical basis of the DHM, which are present in the dynamism and historicity of the processes that determine it. From this perspective, the following central categories of analysis of this framework are adopted: gender, social class, ethnicity, and generation⁽¹⁾.

Specifically in the field of Collective Health Nursing, the Theory of Praxis Intervention in Collective Health Nursing (TIPESC) is based on the DHM and constitutes a theoretical-methodological framework for understanding and intervening in collective health. TIPESC proposes the dynamic systematization of investigative steps of the phenomenon, to capture, interpret and intervene to transform an OR. Anchoring the elaboration of knowledge in this perspective allows scholars to understand reality dialectically, in the sense of highlighting the contradictions that are related to the phenomenon^(1,2).

To strengthen the complexity of research on a social phenomenon and human care, the mixed methods approach is configured as a potential for the integration of quantitative and qualitative data, in the sense of allowing a critical understanding of the delimited object. Conducting the collection of information can occur concurrently,

such as the convergence study; in phases (sequential), such as the sequential exploratory study, which starts with the qualitative step; in a sequential explanatory way, which starts with the quantitative collection. Therefore, regardless of the strategy/design outlined for the research, this method will allow deeper inferences about the phenomenon^(3,4).

The theoretical and methodological assumptions of Nursing science dialogue with the methodological proposal of mixed methods, as this endorses that the researcher proceeds with the collection and analysis of data rigorously in the object exploration step. The researcher who must capture both quantitative and qualitative data, so that, with them, he/she can articulate and combine information with the delimited theoretical bases. The objective of the research designed with mixed methods should deepen discussions about the themes and object(s) of study, in accordance with the worldview adopted in the research^(3,4).

By reaffirming the need to anchor and explain the world view adopted by the study, mixed methods research emerges as powerful to answer scientific questions in the field of Public Health Nursing — which presupposes a critical view of the selected phenomena — and, thus proceed with the elaboration of analyzes and interpretations on the relations of these phenomena with the studied reality.

This study aimed to present reflections on the design and development of a research with mixed methods from the perspective of Nursing in Collective Health. With this, the purpose is to highlight the contribution of reflection in investigations with methodologies that enhance the understanding of the object of study, anchored in the theoretical basis of Nursing in Collective Health.

The relevance of the study lies in its originality, as it presents the intersection between the theoretical and methodological fields adopted, which have the potential to propose coping actions that intervene in the structural, particular, or singular processes that determine the reality of the phenomenon that is intended to change.

METHOD

This is a descriptive and reflective study, based on a doctoral thesis⁽⁵⁾ developed through mixed methods of the sequential explanatory type from the perspective of TIPESC^(1,3,4). The research question of that thesis was: what is the social determination of the occurrences of hospitalizations due to Ambulatory-Care Sensitive Conditions (ACSC) of adolescents in municipalities of a Health Region of Paraná?

The need to deepen the discussion about the phenomenon was verified in a study that explored the object, emphasizing the relationships of ACSC in a Health Regional of Paraná, having as a parameter the age group (10 to 19 years), gender (male and female) and hospitalizations by cause group, according to the Brazilian list of ACSC. The considerations of the aforementioned study highlighted the importance of planning actions for Primary Health Care (PHC), focusing on the health needs of adolescents⁽⁶⁾.

The development of the research relied on mixed methods from the perspective of TIPESC, the object of this reflection, based on the understanding of the social determination of ACSC as a way of knowing the health process and contributing to the recognition and coping with the needs of adolescents. Therefore, the use of mixed methods in this proposal was justified based on the research question, which would require analysis of quantitative and qualitative data that conform the object to its reality and the potential of the method to combine the data, as well as enabling the exploration of these data according to the theoretical-philosophical basis of the DHM and TIPESC.

The cited research was appreciated and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Universidade Federal do Paraná and respected the consolidated criteria for the dissemination of Theoretical Report in Epidemiological Studies (CRT-EE), through a checklist with 15 items, which allows evaluating the quality in reporting the theoretical basis of the research⁽⁷⁾.

Theoretical and methodological foundation: Mixed methods and TIPESC

In understanding the determination of collective health, the elaborated knowledge — mainly that which is based on epidemiology — must highlight and discuss the dialectic and historical processes present in the reality of social subjects. From this perspective, Collective Health cannot limit itself to describing factors that cause health phenomena and injuries, since such phenomena are determined by power relations present in a class society⁽⁸⁾.

As a theoretical-methodological reference in Collective Health Nursing, TIPESC proposes the development of five steps: i) capturing the objective reality; ii) interpretation of objective reality; iii) construction of an intervention project in objective reality; iv) intervention in objective reality; and v) reinterpretation of objective reality. These steps can be developed simultaneously, interspersed or sequentially, as the researcher's approach to the

object/phenomenon produces, dialectically, its recognition and transformation⁽¹⁾.

This understanding presupposes comprehending the phenomenon from the processes that are found in the structural dimension that are related to it, which encompass the economic, social, and political-ideological relations present in the production processes in each historical period. Explore the particular dimension, related to the processes of social reproduction of collectives and composed of different ways of living. The singular dimension, the one most immediate to our eyes, is characterized by the biological and psychological expression of the health process of everyone. Thus, it is argued that, in the body(ies), the wear and tear and protection processes present in the dynamics of the collective way of life are evident and that these are historically and dialectically determined by the insertion of the individual(s) at work^(1,2).

About the use of mixed methods for understanding a research object, it is necessary to consider four aspects. The first aspect is related to the distribution of time in data collection, which can be conducted at the same time (concomitant) or in phases (sequential). For the attribution of weight, considering the second aspect, similar weight can be attributed to quantitative and qualitative data or one of the approaches can be prioritized, which will depend on the research question to be answered and the philosophical and theoretical assumptions that guide the research. world view adopted in the study^(3,4). To describe the research strategy, a notation system is used that identifies the characterization and weight of the study phases: capital letters indicate the prioritized step and the arrow indicates the sequence of phases carried out, that is, QUAN→qual or quan→QUAL^(3,4).

Although less common, there are variants that allow the researcher to prioritize the second phase, that is, the qualitative phase. This variant, called preliminary quantitative design, is used when the researcher focuses on qualitatively examining a phenomenon, but needs previous quantitative results to identify or select potential participants appropriately⁽³⁾.

The third aspect related to the use of mixed methods is the combination, which can occur in the collection period, in data analysis, in the interpretation of results or in these three phases. It comprises the way of mixing the results, combined through connection, integration or incorporation of the collected information^(4,9). Finally, the fourth aspect addresses the theoretical perspective that conducts the investigation of mixed methods, which can be explicit or implicit⁽⁴⁾. In the case of screen reflection, this was explicit in the study, the TIPESC.

In this way, research based on mixed methods contributes to the production of knowledge that helps to reflect on the existing connection between the quantitative and qualitative data of the studied object. These methods can sometimes complement each other, demonstrated through the integration and identification of convergences, sometimes they can diverge from each other, but, in the process of developing knowledge, they allow for in-depth reflections^(3,4).

Analysis of a phenomenon from the perspective of TIPESC and mixed method

In the research design strategy that originated the screen reflection, the notation adopted was quan→QUAL, related to the object cut out for the referred study. The first phase of the study was quantitative and, to meet the first step proposed by TIPESC — capturing the objective reality —, a network of health services was characterized, with a focus on the PHC network, the hospital units, and the mode of delivery. live of the adolescent population in the territory. This characterization was made using secondary data from public websites. Data on ACSC of adolescents in the territory were also collected, originating from the Sistema de Informações Hospitalares do Sistema Único de Saúde [Hospital Information System of the Unified Health System] — SIH/SUS, having been organized with the help of the Official Tabulator application of the Ministry of Health (TABWIN/Datasus), version 3.2.

Still in the first step of TIPESC, the qualitative step explored data on the content of two State Health Plans, published on the website of the State Department of Health of Paraná, referring to the periods 2012-2015 and 2016-2019. In the content analyzed, we sought to highlight the health actions planned to address issues related to the health of adolescents, as well as the general composition of the document and its presentation.

Subsequently, qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with managers and higher-level professionals who worked in PHC units in the study territories. Such interviews aimed to capture the perception of these managers and professionals about the health care of adolescents in the territories under their responsibility. Qualitative data collected through state health plans and semi-structured interviews were organized and analyzed with the support of the WebQDA software⁽⁹⁾.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative data was carried out in four moments. In the first, the connection of the quantitative results was about the ACSC of adolescents in the Health Region, through which the

three municipalities with the highest number of resident adolescents who suffered hospitalizations were identified. Thus, in the second moment, it was possible to outline the criteria for the selection of participants, as well as to elaborate the semi-structured interview instrument to be applied in the qualitative step.

The delimitation of the number of participants was based on the structures of the secretariats and departments related to the health sector of the municipalities, since they had different organizations in the health sector. Thus, it was established that, based on the municipality with the lowest organizational structure in the sector, the same number of participants would be sought in the other two municipal territories. In the end, 35 respondents were obtained.

The second moment of data combination was in the interview with the participants. When starting them, it was considered important to present the quantitative data corresponding to the ACSC of adolescents residing in the interviewee's territory. Thus, upon becoming aware of the information, the participant could discuss issues that explored the actions developed to promote health and prevent the injuries of that group. In addition, the interviewee was able to report his/her understanding of the problems that the adolescents had and that were related to the hospitalizations that had been presented.

The second step of TIPESC — the interpretation of objective reality — took place from data in the process of analysis and integration of quantitative and qualitative data, using the Pillar Integration Process (PIP)⁽¹⁰⁾. The third step of TIPESC — the intervention proposal in the objective reality — was contemplated from the discussion of the meta-inferences that emerged in the PIP. For this, a systematized proposal capable of adding research and social intervention was elaborated, the Critical-Emanicipatory Workshop (CEW), which, later, could promote intervention in the studied reality⁽¹¹⁾.

Table 1 presents a synthesis of the research's main methodological procedures.

In the integration of results, there was the third moment of data integration in mixed methods research, which were collected in qualitative and quantitative approaches. In the discussion process, there was also the integration of data, which represented the fourth moment, since the theoretical and methodological assumptions were respected in relation to the elaboration of critical and reflective knowledge about the social determination of the ACSC of adolescents and their objective reality.

The mixed methods research design was respected in the research planning and in the data combination

Table 1 – Synthesis of the research's methodological procedures, relating them to the steps of TIPESC.

Design of the research	Main objective: to understand the social determination of ACSC of adolescents aged 10 to 19 years in the 2nd Health Regional of Paraná, from 2013 to 2017.9		TIPESC Steps da TIPESC
	Mixed methods research with sequential explanatory design		
	Quan (seta) QUAL		
Specific objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Identify the municipalities of the 2nd Health Region of Paraná with the highest number of ACSC consultations for adolescents from 2013 to 2017;•Identify the municipalities of the 2nd Health Region of Paraná with the highest number of adolescent residents who were hospitalized for PA-sensitive causes from 2013 to 2017.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Analyze the State Health Plans of Paraná in relation to the planning of actions for adolescents;•Describe the network of health services in the municipalities of the 2nd Health Regional of Paraná;•Verify, together with the local health manager(s) and higher-level professionals from the Primary Health Care teams, the reasons for the occurrence of ACSC in adolescents in the municipalities of the 2nd Health Region of Paraná with the highest number of hospitalizations of adolescent residents due to AP-sensitive causes.	1st step of TIPESC: Capture of objective reality
Sample/ Sources/Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•ACSC of adolescents in the municipalities of the 2nd Health Regional of Paraná .	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Network of health services of the 2nd Health Regional of Paraná;•State Health Plans (2012 to 2015; 2016 to 2019);•Local health managers and higher-level professionals working in PHC.	
Data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Secondary database - SIH-SUS.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Secondary database published and available online for public domain;•Semi-structured interview.	
Data analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Statistical and descriptive analysis..	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Content analysis with the support of WebQDA® software.	2nd step of TIPESC: Interpretation of objective reality
Discussion of integrated results	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Meta-inferences from the Pillar Integration Process (PIP), based on the category of analysis — Social Determination of Health.•Intervention proposal — Clinical-Emancipatory Workshop (CEW).		3rd step of TIPESC: Proposal for intervention in objective reality

Source: Adapted from Santos JLG, Erdmann AL, Meirelles BHS, Lanzoni, GMM, Cunha VP, Ross R⁽⁴⁾

process, as summarized in Table 1 and Figure 1. This was done through the diagram with the methodological design, according to the sequential explanatory strategy and the combination of data. It was the quantitative data that allowed describing the object and guiding the collection of qualitative data. Therefore, the essentiality of the quantitative and qualitative data in the study is perceived, with which the research findings were constituted and, consequently, enabled their integration to deepen the understanding of the investigated phenomenon.

The diagram guided the execution of the methodological phases; however, this process did not occur in a tight way, as a sequence of previously defined steps. On the contrary: in the development of the phases, we sought to respect the fluidity of the process in the sense of making it possible to return to the previous phase or even to anticipate a subsequent phase so that, as new results emerge,

it could integrate and relate even more qualitative and quantitative data to enhance future analyses.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study that originated this reflection was based on the theoretical perspective of Public Health Nursing and on the research design of mixed methods. Thus, based on these theoretical-methodological assumptions, the study allowed qualifying the knowledge elaborated from the analysis of the existing connections between the quantitative and qualitative data, which conform the object in the investigated reality.

Among the processes that were identified in the objective reality, it is noteworthy that, in the structural dimension, they were related to the political, economic, and social changes that occurred in the country, which

Figure 1 – Representative diagram of the methodological design of the study.

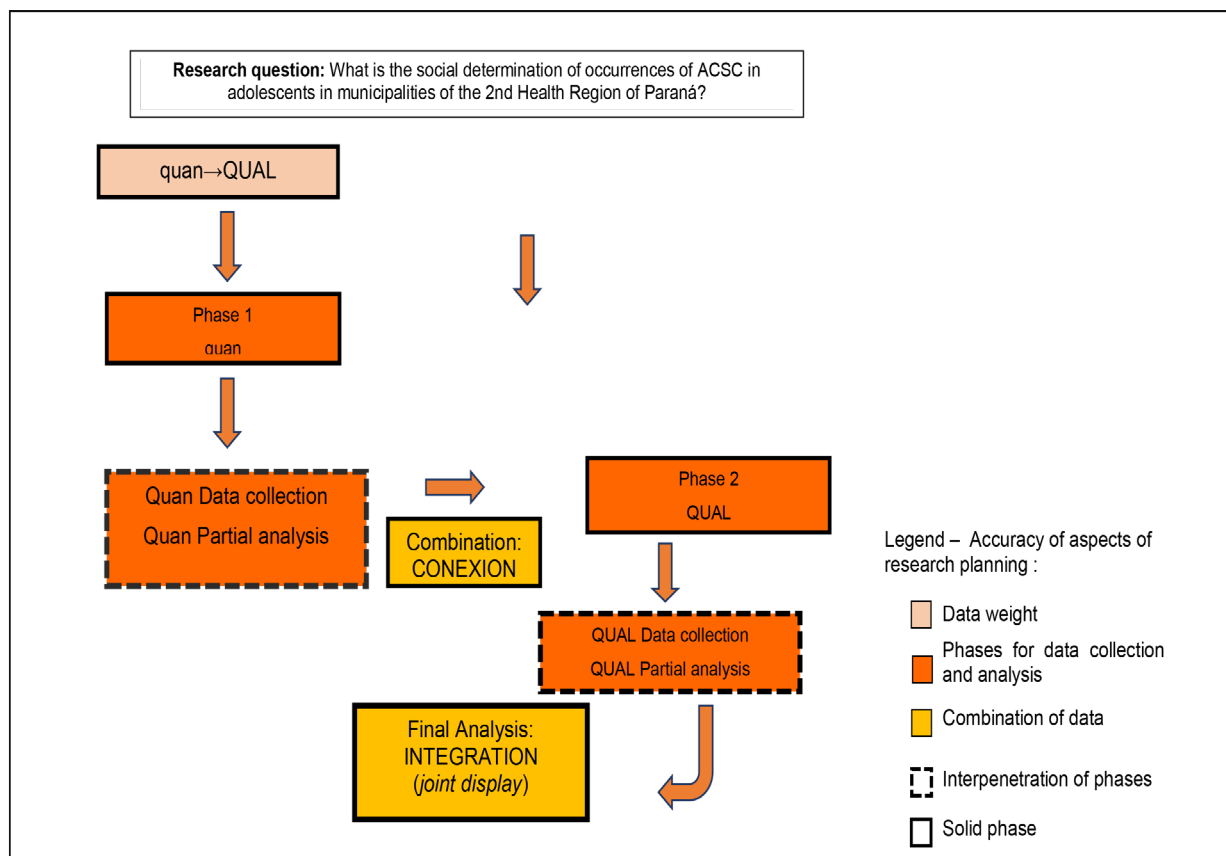


Figure 1 – Representative diagram of the methodological design of the study. Paraná, Brazil, 2021.
Source: The author, 2021⁽⁵⁾

were evidenced in the budgetary definitions for the health sector in the period studied. In the particular dimension, the processes were related to the precariousness of the working conditions of professionals in the sector, the lack of personnel, the low qualification to assist individuals in adolescence and the increase in demand for care in general. Thus, in the study scenario, there was a commitment to the development of health promotion and disease prevention actions in local health services, which are related to the singular dimension of the reality of the phenomenon.

Finally, it is noted that the realization of the phenomenon selected for the study and which gave rise to the present reflection, allowed understanding the reality of the phenomenon through the processes present in the particular dimension, as well as making it possible to analyze those that are found in the structural dimension of the society that, in some way, determine the uniqueness of the ACSC of adolescents in the study scenario.

Therefore, it is reaffirmed that the research design of mixed methods in the methodological perspective of

TIPESC enabled the elaboration of meta-inferences, which revealed strengths and weaknesses of the processes related to the determination of the phenomenon selected for the study. In this sense, the originality of this article is highlighted in presenting the intersection of theoretical and methodological fields to support a proposal to face the phenomenon in its objective reality.

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