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Knowledge production in nursing: the (in)visibility of elderly health care

PRODUÇÃO DO CONHECIMENTO EM ENFERMAGEM: A (IN) VISIBILIDADE DA ATENÇÃO À SAÚDE DO IDOSO

PRODUCCIÓN DEL CONOCIMIENTO EN ENFERMERÍA: LA (IN) VISIBILIDAD EN LA ATENCIÓN A LA SALUD DEL ANCIANO

Kátia Conceição Guimarães Veiga¹, Tânia Maria de Oliva Menezes²

ABSTRACT

Bibliographical, exploratory and descriptive research, with a quantitative approach, aiming at identifying the occurrence of nursing studies about healthcare for the elderly and analyzing the production of this knowledge in five nursing journals published in 2005. The results show that the number of journals in this area is very limited, 3.7%. These journals are concentrated in the states of São Paulo, 40%, and Rio de Janeiro, 28%. Qualitative approaches were predominant, 50%, with several theoretical methodological references being identified. The objects most often studied were the healthcare necessities and the caretaker, with 33.3% each; the professor was present in every article published. It is concluded that there is a necessity for knowledge production in Nursing about healthcare for elderly patients. In order to make this theme more visible, it is necessary to recognize and consolidate this specialty as a professional area, have competent researchers and a national policy of research incentives.

KEY WORDS

Geriatric nursing.
Health of the elderly.
Scientific communication and diffusion.

RESUMO

Esta pesquisa bibliográfica, exploratória e descritiva, com abordagem quantitativa, objetivou identificar a ocorrência de estudos de enfermagem na atenção à saúde do idoso e analisar a produção deste conhecimento em cinco periódicos de enfermagem publicados em 2005. Os resultados demonstraram que o número de publicações nesta área é bastante limitado, 3,7%. Estas publicações estão concentradas nos estados de São Paulo, 40%, e Rio de Janeiro, 28%; predominou a abordagem qualitativa, 50%, sendo identificados vários referenciais teórico-metodológicos. Os objetos mais estudados foram as necessidades em saúde e o cuidador, com 33,3% cada; o docente esteve presente na autoria de todas as publicações. Concluiu-se que há necessidade de produção de conhecimento de Enfermagem em Atenção à Saúde do Idoso e, para dar visibilidade a esta temática, faz-se necessário o reconhecimento e a consolidação desta especialidade enquanto área de atuação profissional, pesquisadores competentes e política nacional de incentivo a pesquisa.

DESCRIPTORES

Enfermagem geriátrica.
Saúde do idoso.
Comunicação e divulgação científica.

RESUMEN

Esta investigación bibliográfica, exploratoria y descriptiva con enfoque cuantitativo, buscó identificar estudios de enfermería en la atención a la salud del anciano y analizar la producción de este conocimiento en cinco periódicos de enfermería publicados en 2005. Los resultados demostraron que el número de publicaciones en esta área es muy limitada (3.7%). Estando centralizada en los estados de São Paulo (40%) y Rio de Janeiro (28%), predominó el enfoque cualitativo (50%), siendo identificados varios referenciales teóricos-metodológicos. Los objetos más estudiados fueron las necesidades de salud y el cuidador, con 33.3% para cada caso, el profesor estuvo presente como autor de todas las publicaciones. Se concluyó que existe necesidad de producir en Enfermería conocimiento sobre la Atención a la Salud del Anciano, así como para dar visibilidad a esta temática, siendo necesario reconocer y consolidar esta especialidad como una área profesional, con investigadores competentes y políticas nacionales e incentivos a la investigación.

DESCRIPTORES

Enfermería geriátrica.
Salud del anciano.
Comunicación y divulgación científica.

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INTRODUCTION

Knowledge has been the greatest drive of human development since the beginning of time. Currently, what differentiates the use of knowledge is the intensity, speed and range with which information is spread and used, producing new knowledge.

In the age of globalization, the evaluation of scientific production is controversial. However, at this moment, the production in the nursing of particular interest to us. It has sought instruments to assure its field of activity in research, configuring a specific type of knowledge, with scientific research being strengthened and better equipped through the great technological discoveries experienced at the end of the 20th century, with the development of electronic resources⁽¹⁾.

The development of research activities in the nursing area is relatively new, dating back to the 1950s, under the influence of the Brazilian Nursing Association - *Associação Brasileira de Enfermagem (ABEN)* -, which, after 1970, introduced graduate programs that nowadays are strong center of nursing knowledge construction. The critical thought lines about this issue point to the need for a qualitative evaluation of the production, in spite of its contribution to humanity as a whole, or the transformations of the conditions of life and health of the population. However, the greatest difficulty is to evaluate scientific work regarding the impact it causes on science and technology, capable of creating new products and assuring the effective and productive transference of its results to society⁽¹⁾.

In modern science, knowledge advances through specialization, becoming stricter as the object it acts on becomes more restricted, contributing for the scientist to become a *specialized ignorant* and entailing negative effects. Post-modern fragmentation is thematic, and the themes approach the different types of knowledge, advancing as the object becomes larger⁽²⁾.

In this sense, progress lies in the specialization of work, by allowing for knowledge development, but it also causes regression, since fragmentary, non-communicant progressive knowledge simultaneously means the progress of crippled knowledge and always leads to a crippling practice⁽³⁾.

Thus, Brazilian nursing has been trying to discuss the issues of the socio-political context that interfere in the many sectors of society, with the ageism of the population as one of the present challenges. According to the 2000 demographic census, the population over 60 years old corresponds to 14.6 million individuals, i.e. 8.5% of the Brazilian population. The demographic projections for 2025 indicate 32 million people in this age range, which will corre-

spond to 15% of the Brazilian population. The growth of this population stratus leads to a higher incidence of chronic-degenerative diseases, with the common co-morbidities of old age.

The current elderly healthcare models have shown to be of little effect and even unfeasible, because of the demand of this clientele. This fact evidences the fragility of conventional healthcare services, which still do not meet the demands of seniors who claim for high-quality and sufficient specialized care. The implementation and consolidation of practices that see to this population in the specificities of healthcare was necessary, according to the fundamental principles of the Single Health System, that is, universality, equity and integrality.

Concerned with the situation, the Government passed Law #8842 in 1994, which regulates the National Policy for Elderly Healthcare - *Política Nacional de Saúde do Idoso (PNSI)* and proposes care for the specificities of this group; as well as actions that promote healthy aging, maintenance or rehabilitation of functional capacity, provide healthcare, support the development of informal care and qualification of specialized human resources, besides studies and research in this area.

The current elderly healthcare models have shown to be of little effect and even unfeasible, because of the demand of this clientele.

In this context, elderly healthcare nursing constitutes a field of knowledge necessary to the group of healthcare programs for the general population, becoming a challenge for these professionals to overcome the clinical-curative approach towards multiprofessional and interdisciplinary actions. Therefore, the occurrence of nursing studies about elderly healthcare published in journals was chosen as the study object.

Starting with the assumption that the several nursing journals reveal scientific advances in the specialty of elderly healthcare, consolidated as a field of knowledge, the goals of this study were defined as the identification of the occurrence of general nursing studies in elderly healthcare in five nursing journals published in 2005 and the analysis of knowledge production in nursing, focused on elderly healthcare.

METHOD

This is an exploratory and descriptive literature review with a quantitative approach, concerned with the description of the elements of the research phenomenon. The exploratory descriptive method allows the investigator to analyze a given problem in-depth without manipulating it⁽⁴⁾.

Data collection occurred in July 2006, using two cards to seek information about the journals, which allowed us to identify the occurrence of these publications in the elderly healthcare area in the Brazilian scenario, among the

journals with a more generic orientation. Also, it allowed for the descriptive analysis, which became our object of study. Five journals from the South, Southeast and Central-West were selected, totaling 23 issues, corresponding to 100% of the production in 2005.

These journals were chosen due to their classification by the Qualis index of *Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal em Nível Superior (CAPES)* of one of them as B international, herein named Journal IV, and the others qualified as C international, herein named I, II, III and V, respectively. Four of these are published by institutions with *stricto sensu* graduate programs and contain articles from all nursing areas.

Data were described with the indication of absolute and relative frequencies, and presented in the form of tables and figures.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The literature search looked at 484 articles, 19 of which were related to Nursing in Elderly Healthcare, which corresponds to 3.9%. However, one of these articles looked at the adult population, in addition to the elderly, and another was developed in Mallorca, Spain. The latter was discarded for being outside the Brazilian scope. Eventually, 18 articles made up the selection, which represents 3.7%. In Table 1, we present the distribution of the Nursing journals on elderly healthcare in 2005.

Table 1 – Distribution of Nursing articles on elderly healthcare in five Nursing journals published in 2005 – Salvador, 2006

Area Articles	Elderly Nursing Healthcare	
	N	%
I	4	22.2
II	3	16.7
III	5	27.8
IV	6	33.3
V	0	0.0
Total	18	100.0

Legend: B International = IV; C International = I, II, III and V.

This table shows that the journals classified by the QUALIS/CAPES system as B international, IV, had the highest number of articles in the elderly healthcare area, with 33.3% (06) of them, followed by journal III, with 27.8% (05); journal V published no articles on the topic. It is worth noting that the B international journal is a bi-monthly journal, with two special editions in the year studied.

The CAPES guidelines for the evaluation of *stricto sensu* graduate programs have guided the programs to maintain international-profile journals, which have high publishing costs, making nurses seek this kind of journals in Brazil, which seems to justify the higher demand for articles in international journals⁽⁵⁾.

Interest in studies about old age in its social relations, life experiences, possibilities and citizenship actually arises in the 1970s, in the current scope of the Brazilian society⁽⁶⁾.

Considering this fact and the increase in population longevity, a phenomenon seen as global and made evident in the Brazilian reality, the low publication of research articles in the elderly healthcare area shows the need for Nursing to prioritize this activity in its healthcare actions because, unlike developed countries, Brazil has been undergoing fast changes in the increase of the elderly population, which brings along consequences of all types and in all areas of human activity, provoking multiple and complex necessities that require specific knowledge⁽⁷⁾.

Therefore, it is worth noting that scientific production in the nursing area addressing the elderly is scarce, since this is considered a phenomenon with large repercussions in healthcare, focused on in science after the 1970s.

Knowledge construction in gerontology has been confronted with delays, particularly in the educational and research areas, although this is considered a highly promising area. This is due to the importance of geriatrics over other fields in this area; gerontology's difficulty in becoming a solid course, or even a science and, as such, being capable of defining a work area and a field of knowledge construction; and even due to resistance against interdisciplinary research⁽⁸⁾.

Table 2 shows the distribution of the Nursing articles on elderly healthcare according to the type of article and journal, in 2005.

Table 2 - Distribution of Nursing articles on elderly healthcare according to the type of article and journal, in 2005 - Salvador - 2006

Journals	I		II		III		IV		Total	
Type	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Research or Original	2	11.1	1	5.6	4	22.2	6	33.3	13	72.2
Review					1	5.6			1	5.6
Reflection			1	5.6					1	5.6
Case/experience reports	2	11.1	1	5.6					3	16.7
Subtotal	4	22.2	3	16.7	5	27.8	6	33.3	18	100.0

As shown in Table 2, the highest percentage of Nursing articles on elderly healthcare is classified as research or original article 72.2%⁽¹³⁾, followed by experience reports with 16.7%⁽³⁾.

In this sense, the development and utilization of knowledge are essential for the constant improvement of nursing healthcare. Nurses are encouraged to adopt research-based practices, using these results to support their decisions, actions and interactions with the patients, accepting this necessity as an indicator that their actions are clinically appropriate, have effective costs and bring positive results for the clientele under their responsibility, strengthening the identity of nursing as a profession⁽⁹⁾.

Figure 1 presents the distribution of the Nursing articles according to the research's state of origin:

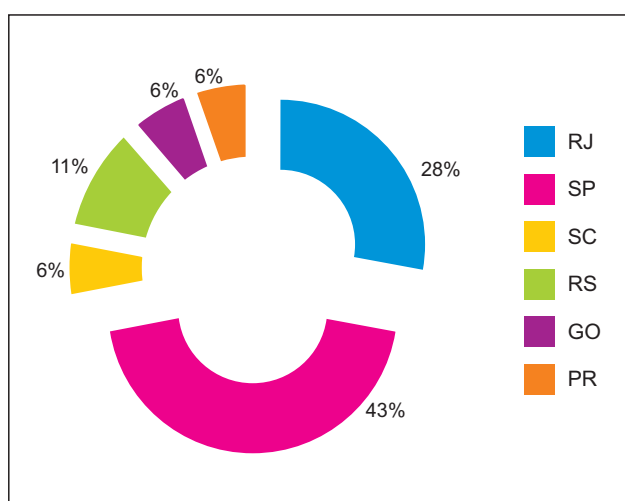


Figure 1 - Distribution of the Nursing articles on elderly healthcare in 2005, according to the research's state of origin - Salvador - 2006

Figure 1 shows that this type of research is concentrated in two Brazilian states, São Paulo (eight articles) and Rio de Janeiro (five articles). These were the pioneering states in the creation of graduate courses (M.Sc. and Ph.D.), confirming the development of scientific nursing production at the professional education centers for *stricto sensu* courses, started in Brazil in 1969 with the University Reform⁽¹⁰⁾.

The geographic distribution of this scientific production in Brazilian Nursing is not uniform, and corresponds to the location of the graduate courses. This is illustrated by the distribution of knowledge production centers, which are remarkably concentrated in the southeastern region⁽¹¹⁾.

The scientific production in the nursing area appears in the context of the Brazilian education reform. It is conditioned to the offer of available advisors, mainly occurring in the Southeastern and Southern regions. This is in accordance with current public educational policies, which prioritize better developed and economically stronger regions over other regions of the country⁽¹²⁾.

Therefore, graduate courses are configured as practical spaces that allow researchers to develop research actions, the knowledge construction process and new technologies. These courses usually publish journals to publicize their production.

In Figure 2, we present the distribution of the Nursing articles on the studied area regarding the type of research design.

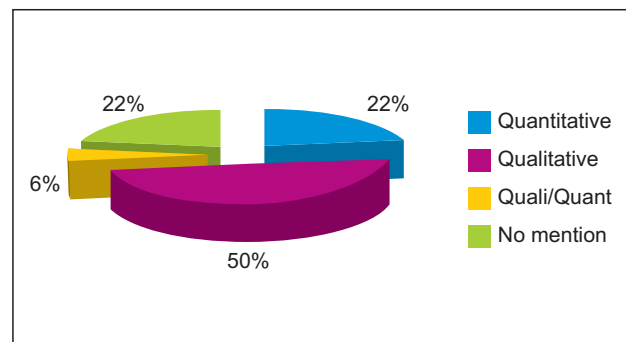


Figure 2 - Distribution of the Nursing articles on elderly healthcare in the year 2005, according to the type of research design. Salvador - 2006

In this figure, it is observed that qualitative studies are predominant, representing 50% of the total, while quantitative studies represent 22% of the articles, and those combining qualitative and quantitative methods corresponded to only 6%. These results reflect the growing trend of qualitative studies in the nursing area, which was started in the late 1980s, marking the transition from a positivist scientific perspective, which allowed for a partial view of experience processes⁽¹³⁾.

The adoption of qualitative methods reflects the change in paradigms in the quest to understand the phenomenon and the attempt to get closer to reality, i.e. *a profound change in thoughts, perception and values that form a given perspective of reality*⁽¹⁴⁾.

In this sense, when there is a scientific revolution in a society, by itself changed by science, the emerging paradigm cannot be only scientific, *the paradigm of prudent knowledge*. It should also be social, *the paradigm of a decent life*⁽²⁾.

Increasing amounts of this type of research occurred in most graduate programs, thus becoming the main type of research design in the nursing area. This trend seems to explain why study objects that address the comprehension of reality have shown to be important for the advancement and consolidation of nursing knowledge⁽¹³⁾.

Regarding quantitative methods, modern science has recognized Mathematics as an instrument that allowed for the analysis, research logic and model to represent the structure of matter. Based on this central positioning, two important consequences arose, which influenced the entire scientific thinking. One is the fact that *in order to know, it is necessary to quantify, and scientific validity is a result of the validity of the measurements*. Therefore, the qualities of the object have

no scientific value. The other is related to modern scientific thinking, which states that *in order to know, it is necessary to divide and classify, so that the relations of the things can be comprehended afterwards*⁽¹⁵⁾.

We agree with the statement that the transition from the hegemony of quantitative to qualitative methods re-

flects the interest in study objects that result in production aimed at mastering nursing practice, focused on a broader theoretical construction in the healthcare sector⁽¹³⁾.

Table 3 shows the methodological-theoretical reference framework the authors adopted in the articles on elderly nursing healthcare.

Table 3 - Distribution of the articles on elderly nursing healthcare according to the theoretical-methodological reference framework - Salvador - 2006

Theoretical-methodological reference framework	N	%
Positivism	5	27.7
Phenomenology	1	5.6
Symbolic Interactionism	1	5.6
Nursing theories	1	5.6
Paulo Freire's Dialogic Action Theory	1	5.6
Collective subject discourse approach	1	5.6
Cultural approach	1	5.6
Legislation	2	11
No mention	5	27.7
Total	18	100.0

In this table, positivism is observed in 27.8%⁽⁵⁾ of the nursing articles on elderly healthcare. This fact makes the possibility of intervention difficult because, in the positivist way of thinking, *the intention is to identify, describe and compare, without supporting interventions focused on changing reality*⁽¹⁶⁾. We highlight that three articles focusing on case/experience reports are included in the *no mention* item.

Although this reference is strongly present in nursing research, the adoption of other theoretical references in the nursing articles on elderly healthcare show a strong tendency to adopt theoretical references belonging to human, social and behavioral sciences, evidencing the need to understand subjective aspects of practical experiences, since these are experienced in the nursing area.

Interest in and performance of qualitative studies have been frequent in the healthcare area and, consequently, provoke a higher demand in institutional research programs and scientific journals⁽¹⁷⁾.

In this sense, and by considering that absolute knowledge about what goes on with the other is not possible, a theory based on flexible assumptions is necessary, which enables dialogue with the several movements and expressions of this subject, with its potentials and diversity or processes, which will brand the research as incomplete. Therefore, the notion about subjectivity should always highlight the subjects' scenarios, their qualities, ways of speaking, senses and specific configurations, which point to its own complexity⁽¹⁸⁾.

This fact allows one to consider that nursing researchers' adopting of different methodological foci, based on different thought currents, evidences the change of paradigms when they focus on distinct objects.

In this context, all courses, both natural sciences and human sciences, can be mobilized today, so as to converge towards the human condition⁽¹⁹⁾.

Figure 3 presents the objects studied in the Nursing articles on elderly healthcare.

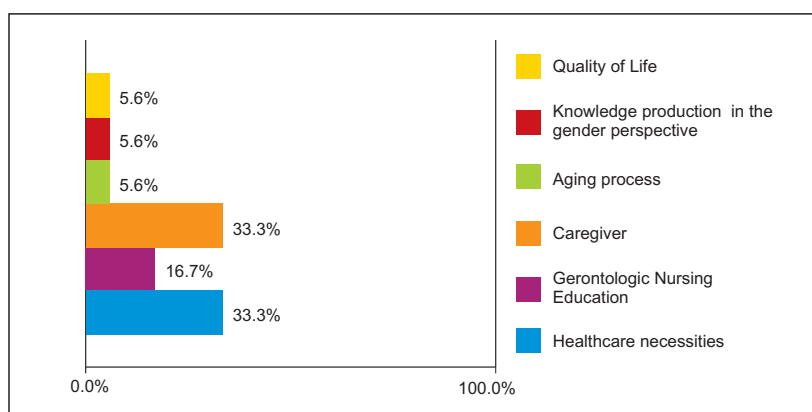


Figure 3 – Distribution of the study objects in Nursing articles on elderly healthcare in the year 2005 - Salvador - 2006

In this figure, research objects related to the necessities of elderly healthcare and the caregiver were predominant, with 33.3% each, followed by gerontologic nursing education at 16.7%. Knowledge centered on the disease is the base for the general nursing culture, being complemented by knowledge centered on techniques or care practice⁽²⁰⁾.

These results seem to indicate that, due to increasing population ageism in several countries, including Brazil, and the changes in the morbidity patterns observed in the elderly, the number of family members as caregivers is growing, especially women. They have to balance all household and professional activities, often without informal or formal systematic help that will prepare them to see to the necessities of the seniors. Added to these are the economic pressures and those originated in the healthcare system itself, equally unprepared to welcome the elderly and their families⁽²¹⁾.

In this perspective, the research activity seems to fulfill the need to build science-based practices, bringing the technical and healthcare studies closer to the day-to-day nursing routines for elderly care, making this specialty visible, recognized and consolidated, thus contributing to the scientific and technological advancement of the profession as a social practice, in consonance with the National Policy of Elder Healthcare.

Table 4 presents the distribution of nursing articles on elderly healthcare according to the researcher's professional activity.

Table 4 - Distribution of nursing articles on elderly healthcare according to the researcher's professional activity in 2005 - Salvador - 2006

Author	No.	%
P + GS	6	33.3
P	5	27.8
P + N	3	16.7
P + OP	1	5.6
P + N + S	1	5.6
P + N + GS	1	5.6
P + S	1	5.6
TOTAL	18	100

Legend: P=professor; N=nurse; GS=graduate student; S=Student; OP=other professionals (psychologist, social worker and occupational therapist).

This table shows that that the highest percentage of articles was present among professors and graduate students with 33.3% (06) working in co-authorship, followed by professors 27.8% (05) and professors and nurses, 16.7% (3). It was also observed that the professor was present in the authorship of all articles analyzed.

Considering the increased offer of *stricto sensu* graduate courses in the doctoral modality in the past two decades, mainly aimed at preparing nursing Ph.D.'s capable of developing research, teaching and leadership in the healthcare area, these courses represent not only the possibility of professional qualification, but also knowledge

updating, becoming the support basis for research feedback and the reorientation of practice⁽²²⁾. In this sense, faculty members-researchers in particular, led by the roles of teacher and scientific investigator, feel compelled to dedicate themselves more effectively to this activity⁽²³⁾.

The analysis of researchers' institution of origin showed that they were linked to public institutions in 94.4%⁽¹⁷⁾ of cases, which were highlighted as the most prolific producers of scientific knowledge on elderly healthcare. In part, this is due to these institutions being fields of research promotion for all courses, and the healthcare area in particular, which requires constant updating and integration of professors, nurses and other professionals working in these institutions for the production of knowledge. Scientific production is also considered to be related to constant evaluation in search for transformation and renovation of reality as a way to guarantee quality⁽²⁴⁾.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The bibliographic search performed in five nursing journals published in 2005, aiming to identify the occurrence of nursing studies on elderly healthcare, as well as to analyze the production of this knowledge, allowed us to perceive that the advancement of articles in this area is still shy, and evidenced the need for professionals and researchers to *visualize* elders in the production of research and articles focused on this specific type of knowledge, in order to reorient the educational practices and gerontologic nursing healthcare.

The results show that the amount of articles in the elderly healthcare area is still limited, 3.7%, which should arouse the interest of the professionals working in geriatrics and gerontology for the need to develop studies, in view of the tendencies and demands in practice, demanding specific knowledge to deliver care to the senior share of the population.

In this sense, nursing research is essential for nurses to understand the several dimensions of their profession; allow for the description of characteristics in a particular nursing situation, about which little is known; explain the phenomena that should be considered in the planning of nursing actions; foresee the probable results of the decisions to be made; control the occurrence of undesirable results and the start of activities to promote the patient's desired behavior⁽⁹⁾.

The production of knowledge in the nursing area of elderly healthcare was concentrated in the states of São Paulo (40%) and Rio de Janeiro (28%), with a predominance of the qualitative approach (50%), using several theoretical-methodological reference frameworks. The objects most often studied were the healthcare needs and the caregiver, 33.3% each, and the professor was present in the authorship of all articles analyzed.

Considering that nursing practice has been maintained through oral tradition at professional level, it is observed that

professionals feel more involved with the knowledge construction process as a basic educational element than as a working instrument⁽²⁰⁾, which confirms the research data.

Therefore, one of the greatest challenges to overcome this limitation, which is part of the history of nursing, is the planning of nursing through partnerships among promotion organisms, government, public and the private institutions for its funding and execution, besides the implementation of a system to evaluate scientific production in the area of elderly healthcare and the democratization of knowledge through a system for information dissemination, available to the whole society.

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