

A DECADE OF THE GRADUATE PROGRAM IN NURSING AT THE FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF ALFENAS: A BIBLIOMETRIC STUDY OF DISSERTATIONS

UMA DÉCADA DO PROGRAMA DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM ENFERMAGEM DA UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE ALFENAS: UM ESTUDO BIBLIOMÉTRICO DAS DISSERTAÇÕES

UNA DÉCADA DEL PROGRAMA DE POSTGRADO EN ENFERMERÍA DE LA UNIVERSIDAD FEDERAL DE ALFENAS: ESTUDIO BIBLIOMÉTRICO DE LAS DISERTACIONES

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To characterize the master's dissertations presented to the PPGENF of UNIFAL - MG, from 2012 to 2022. **Method:** exploratory, descriptive and retrospective study, of the bibliometric type, which used documentary research as a basis, using descriptive statistics. **Results:** 128 dissertations were characterized. Three specific themes: communicable diseases, health of the elderly, development of technologies and innovation in health were less addressed, characterizing research gaps. **Conclusion:** This diagnosis can be used to guide the planning of PPGENF UNIFAL-MG in the development of actions aimed at improving it for the next four years. It is suggested to periodically carry out different types of studies on the program's production, under different aspects, in order to enhance the reflection on its contribution to science, to the resolution of the demands of Brazilian society regarding health and to the professional valorization in all its fields of activity.

Descriptors: Nursing; Academic Dissertation; Bibliometrics; Health Postgraduate Programs.

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RESUMO

Objetivo: Realizar a caracterização das dissertações de mestrado apresentadas ao PPGENF da UNIFAL – MG, no período de 2012 a 2022. **Método:** estudo exploratório, descritivo e retrospectivo, do tipo bibliométrico, que utilizou como base a pesquisa documental, utilizada a estatística descritiva. **Resultados:** Foram caracterizadas 128 dissertações. Três temáticas específicas: doenças transmissíveis, saúde do idoso, desenvolvimento de tecnologias e inovação em saúde foram menos abordadas, caracterizando lacunas de pesquisa. **Conclusão:** Este diagnóstico pode ser utilizado para nortear o planejamento do PPGENF UNIFAL-MG no desenvolvimento de ações que visem o aperfeiçoamento do mesmo para os próximos quadriênios. Sugere-se a realização periódica de diferentes tipos de estudo sobre a produção do programa, sob diferentes aspectos, a fim de potencializar a reflexão sobre a contribuição do mesmo para a ciência, para a resolução das demandas da sociedade brasileira no que tange à saúde e para a valorização profissional em todos os seus campos de atuação.

Descritores: Enfermagem; Dissertação Acadêmica; Bibliometria; Programas de Pós-Graduação em Saúde.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Caracterizar las disertaciones de maestría presentadas al PPGENF de la UNIFAL - MG, de 2012 a 2022. **Método:** estudio exploratorio, descriptivo y retrospectivo, de tipo bibliométrico, que utilizó como base la investigación documental, utilizando estadística descriptiva. **Resultados:** fueron caracterizadas 128 disertaciones. Tres temas específicos: enfermedades transmisibles, salud de la tercera edad, desarrollo tecnológico e innovación en salud fueron menos abordados, caracterizando lagunas de investigación. **Conclusión:** Este diagnóstico puede ser utilizado para orientar la planificación del PPGENF UNIFAL-MG en el desarrollo de acciones dirigidas a mejorarlo para los próximos cuatro años. Se sugiere la realización periódica de diferentes tipos de estudios sobre la producción del programa, bajo diferentes aspectos, a fin de ampliar la reflexión sobre su contribución a la ciencia, a la resolución de las demandas de la sociedad brasileña en materia de salud y al perfeccionamiento profesional en todos sus campos de actuación.

Descritores: Enfermería; Tesis Académica; Bibliometría; Programas de Posgrado en Salud.

INTRODUCTION

Advances in scientific research in Nursing have been achieved almost entirely in the spaces or environments where academic master's, professional master's and doctoral courses are offered.¹ Thus, postgraduate studies in Nursing have gained increasing prominence within the national and international scientific community.²

In this context of expansion and qualification of scientific research in

Nursing, the Federal University of Alfenas (UNIFAL-MG), created in 2005, on the foundations of the almost century-old School of Pharmacy and Dentistry of Alfenas, applied to the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES) for the creation of the Postgraduate Program in Nursing (PPGENF), initially contemplating a master's degree. The first selection process was carried out between February and

March 2011, and by 2022, 134 master's degrees had been awarded.

The successive positive evaluations of the PPGENF at UNIFAL-MG created conditions for the request to expand the postgraduate program to the doctorate level in Nursing, which was contemplated and started in 2020. Currently, the program covers two lines of research: Nursing Care Process, and Management in Health and Education Services, and occupies a prominent place regionally, as it is the only *stricto sensu* postgraduate program in nursing in the south of the State of Minas Gerais.³

Taking into account the temporal trajectory of a decade of existence of the PPGENF, which was the setting for the production of a diversity of studies developed in the existing lines of research, contemplating different themes in nursing with varied methodological approaches, the following questions arose: - What are the characteristics of the dissertations developed in the PPGENF of UNIFAL-MG in its first decade of existence? Thus, the general objective of this study is to characterize the master's dissertations presented to the PPGENF of UNIFAL - MG, in the period from 2012 to 2022.

From an academic point of view, it is justifiable to identify the characteristics of the dissertations developed in the PPGENF of UNIFAL-MG, since this

allows the PPGENF coordination, the advisors, co-advisors and the master's students to obtain a broad knowledge about what is being produced. In addition, this characterization makes it possible to compare the dissertations with the research priorities in the area of nursing, identifying gaps that need to be addressed.

With this information, it is possible to provide the necessary guidelines for the continuous improvement of the program, contributing to the scientific development of Nursing. Furthermore, these guidelines have the ultimate goal of solving problems in professional practice and improving the quality of health care provided to the population.

METHOD

This is an exploratory, descriptive and retrospective study, of the bibliometric type, which used documentary research as a basis.

Exploratory research aims to expand, reveal and re-examine previously existing ideas about other literature, and is used in situations where the topic in question is little investigated.⁴ The descriptive study is linked to an existing question, analyzing the relationship between variables and events, collecting data and characteristics of a group. It seeks to identify beliefs, behaviors and patterns of a population, opening up the experience of

the sample to be studied.⁴ The bibliometric study is characterized by research that uses mathematical and statistical methods to investigate and quantify the processes of written communication, with literature being the key ingredient in the process of communicating knowledge.⁵

The search was carried out in the Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD) of UNIFAL - MG and data collection took place from October 2022 to February 2023. In order to assist in the extraction and organization of data, as well as in the subsequent analysis and interpretation, a table was developed with Excel software. The items collected were: year of defense, line of research, gender of the author, advisor and co-advisor, type of study, methodological approach, theme, location of investigation, identification of research participants with primary data collection, gender of participants, age of participants and descriptors used in the abstract. Coding was performed to insert the information in the form of numbers into the database, as per Appendix A.

In order to calculate and present the data collected, descriptive statistics were used, and they were organized using graphs

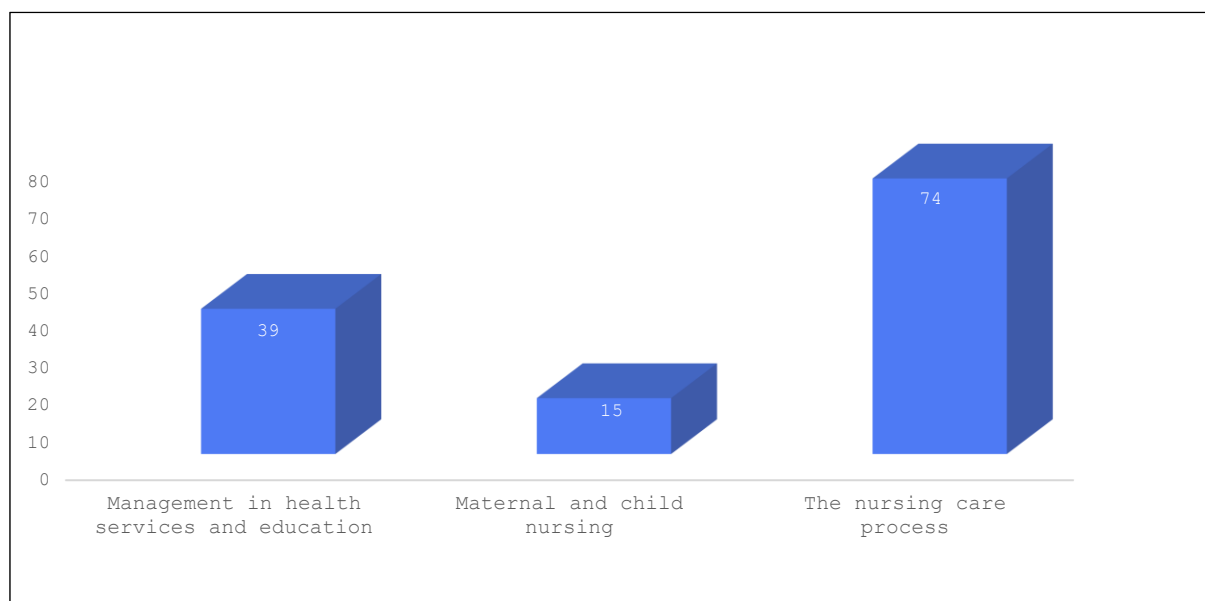
and tables using Excel software. Furthermore, in order to meet all the proposed objectives, we used the Word Counter 360° software, which was used to count the words in the title and abstract of the dissertations, thus generating a list of words that have greater employability and relevance.

RESULTS

Of the 134 master's degree defenses of PPGENF UNIFAL-MG that occurred between 2012 and 2022, 128 dissertations that were available and freely accessible in the BDTD during the data collection period were analyzed. Regarding annual production, the years 2012 and 2019 were identified as having the lowest production, as only one dissertation was presented in each of these years, and the largest number of presentations occurred in 2020, with a total of 24.

Regarding the Research Lines, Graph 1 shows that the majority of the characterized dissertations indicate the research line "The Nursing Care Process", with 74 works; in contrast, the research line "Maternal and Child Nursing" was less frequent, with 15 dissertations.

Graph 1- Distribution of the number of dissertations presented to PPGENF UNIFAL-MG according to the line of research. Alfenas, 2023.

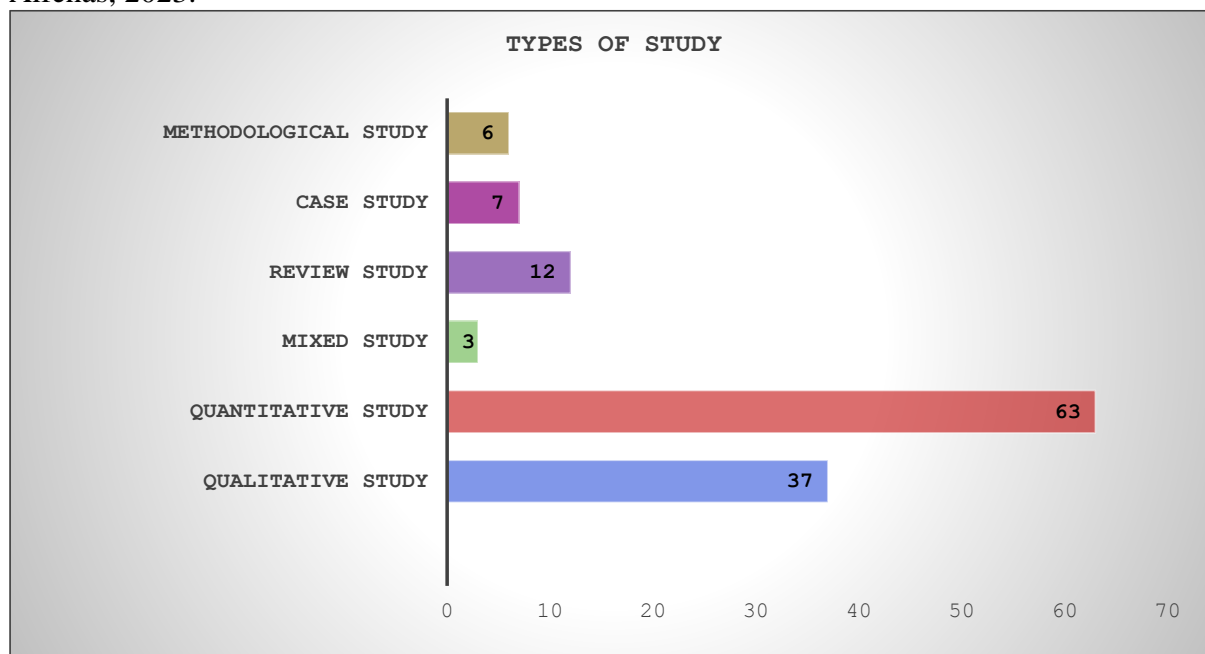


Source: authors.

The authors, advisors and co-advisors were characterized according to gender. It was found that the female sex was predominant in the three categories, with the number of women being 115, 101 and 53, respectively, in each category.

Regarding the types of study presented in the dissertations, there was a predominance of quantitative research, with a total of 63 works, as shown in Graph 2.

Graph 2- Types of study used in the dissertations presented to PPGENF UNIFAL-MG. Alfenas, 2023.

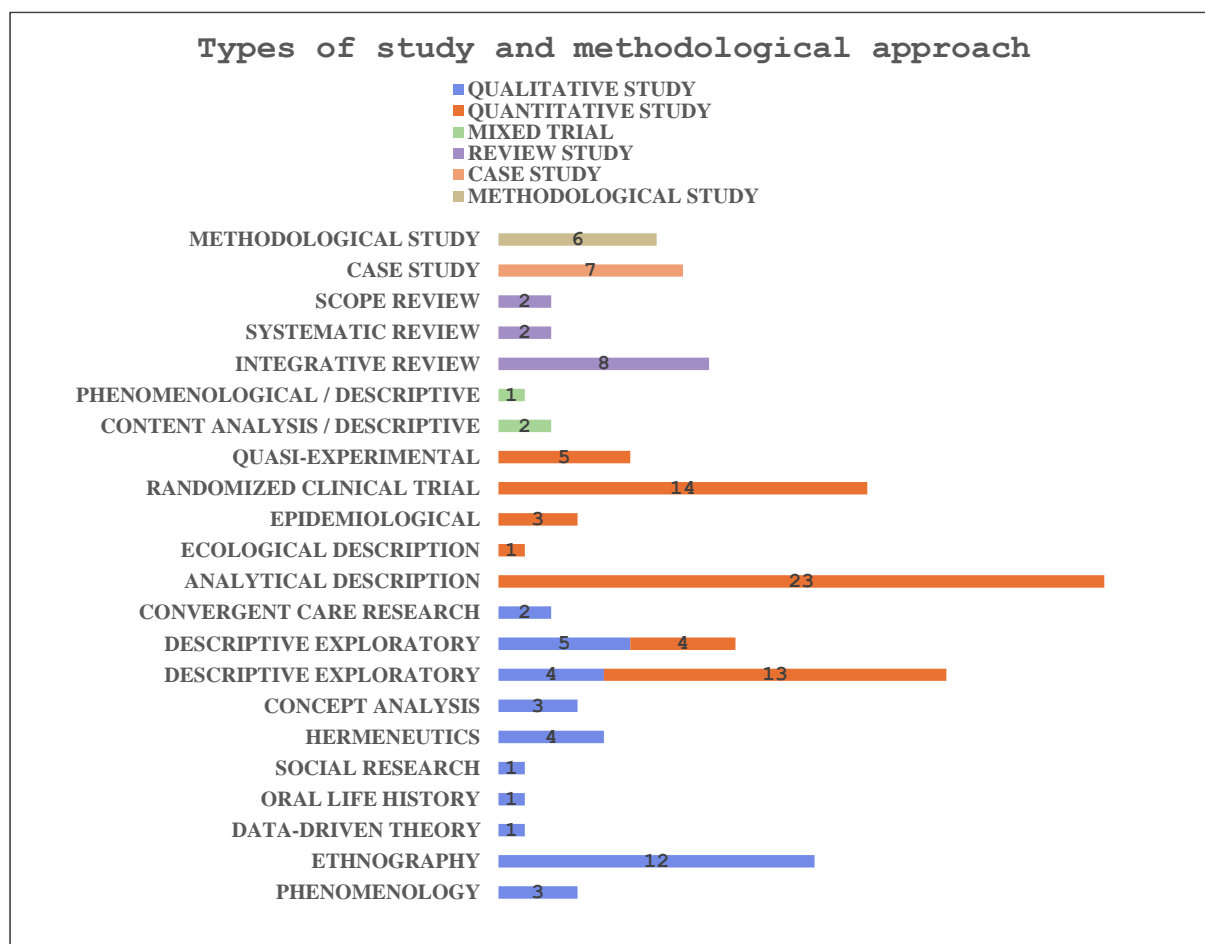


Source: author.

Regarding the methodological approach, they are subdivided according to the types of study. We can see, for example, in Graph 3, that within the quantitative studies, the most used methodological

approach was descriptive-analytical, present in 23 studies. Regarding qualitative studies, the predominant approach was Ethnography, present in 12 dissertations.

Graph 3- Distribution of methodological approaches used in the dissertations presented to PPGENF UNIFAL-MG. Alfenas, 2023.

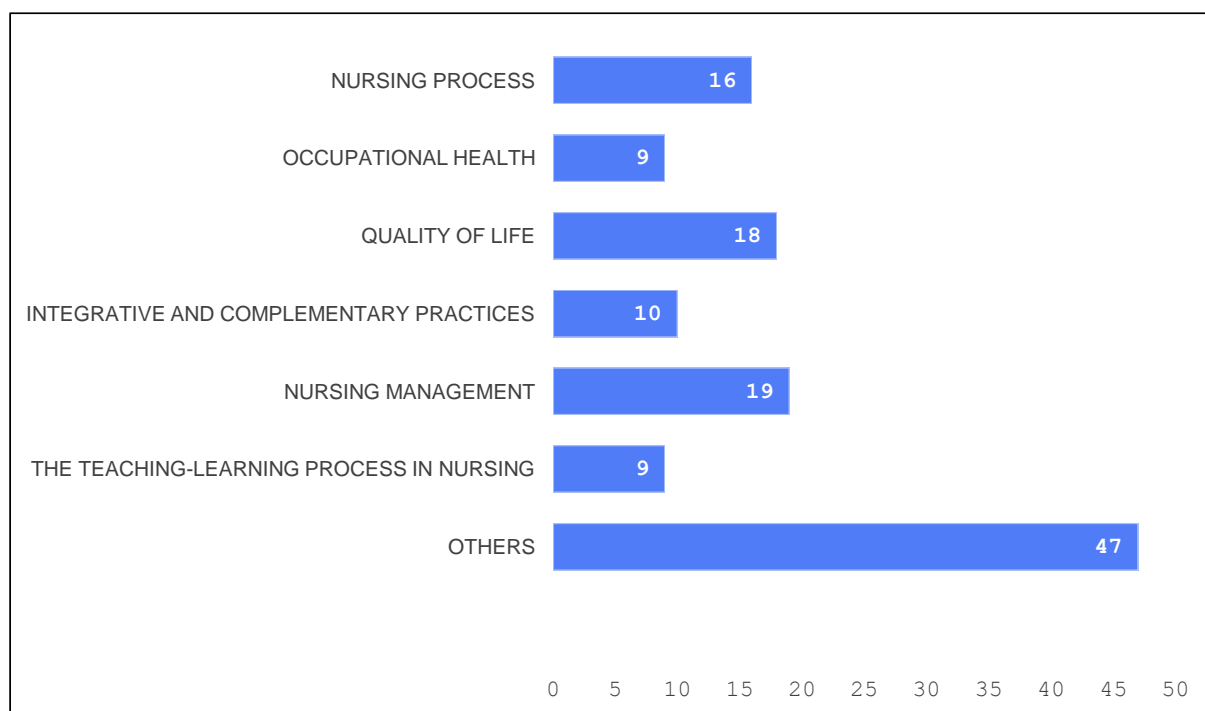


Source: author.

The 128 dissertations addressed 22 different themes, with nursing management, present in 19 studies, being the most studied theme. Quality of life (18

studies) and the nursing process (16 studies) follow in the sequence of greatest expression (Graph 4).

Graph 4- Theme of the dissertations presented to PPGENF UNIFAL-MG. Alfenas, 2023.



Source: authors.

Sixteen types of research sites were coded, where the dissertations were developed. The health units where the Family Health Strategy operates were the data collection site most frequently indicated in the dissertations, covering 26 studies. The sites defined as “Public Hospital Institution” and “Higher Education Institution” follow in sequence, with 22 studies each.

Regarding the research population, present in the studies with primary data collection, 52 dissertations had patients as the population. Professionals and students remain as the second and third largest

populations, respectively, present in 39 and 14 studies. Regarding the frequency of gender in the research population, most of the dissertations, 84 studies, dealt with both sexes. Classifying the research population by age group, adults were the focus of 49 dissertations, and elderly people and adults together were the focus of 38 dissertations.

In the 128 dissertations analyzed, 274 different descriptors were identified. Those most frequently used are indicated in Figure 1. The descriptors “Nursing” and “Primary Health Care” stand out as the most used.

Figure 1- Word cloud containing the most used descriptors in the abstracts of dissertations presented to PPGENF UNIFAL-MG. Alfenas, 2023.



Source: authors.

When analyzing the frequency of words appearing in the titles of the 128 dissertations, it was found that “health”, “evaluation” and “nursing” were the most used. Analyzing the frequency of words appearing in the general objective of the dissertations, it was found that “evaluate”, “health”, and “analyze” were the most used in the construction of the objectives of the dissertations.

DISCUSSION

Postgraduate education contributes to the knowledge base in the field, advancing evidence-based practice, improving the quality of nursing care, and implementing innovations in the field. It is assumed that a university is evaluated by its scientific production, among other teaching and extension indicators. Characterizing the

scientific production of a postgraduate program becomes a task of utmost importance.

PPGENF UNIFAL-MG accepts its master's degree students through a selection process with a specific notice. The course has a minimum duration of 12 months and a maximum duration of 24 months. In the notice, published in 2022, the total number of vacancies offered by PPGENF was 18, 11 in the research line “Nursing Care Process”; and 7 in the research line “Management in Health and Education Services”.⁶

The distribution of dissertations in the research lines is consistent with the number of vacancies and professors registered in each of them. Currently, the line with the largest number of professors is “The Nursing Care Process”, with a total of

twelve professors, eleven of whom are registered as permanent and one as a collaborator. The research line “Management in health and education services” has eight professors in total, seven of whom are permanent and one collaborator. Regarding the line “Maternal and child nursing”, which had the lowest frequency of research, it is explained that due to the fact that as of 2018, this segment ceased to exist and its professors were allocated to the line “The Nursing Care Process”.⁶

Public universities are centers of academic excellence that offer a wide range of resources and opportunities for the production of knowledge, innovation, and technological development. The Ministry of Health's research priority agenda includes 172 lines of research, distributed across 14 thematic axes, which guide the allocation of research resources to address health research problems.⁷ The priorities are: environment, work, and health; pharmaceutical care; post-incorporation evaluation; development of technologies and innovation in health; chronic noncommunicable diseases; communicable diseases; health economics and management; work management and health education; health programs and policies; women's health; health of the black population and traditional communities;

health of the elderly; indigenous health, and maternal and child health.

The two current lines of research of the PPGENF UNIFAL-MG, as well as most of its production, are aligned with six of the fourteen axes of this agenda: environment, work and health; chronic non-communicable diseases, health programs and policies, work management and health education, women's health and maternal and child health. There are few works related to three themes: communicable diseases, health of the elderly and development of technologies and innovation in health. However, the presence of works indicates potential for development in these axes. No works were identified in five priority axes, pharmaceutical assistance; post-incorporation evaluation; indigenous health; health economics and management and health of the black population and traditional communities, given the local and regional reality in which the program is inserted, as well as the professional specificities of nurses.

Nursing can be historically divided into pre- and post-Florence Nightingale periods. In both periods, the workforce was almost exclusively female, and this has continued culturally to this day.⁸ Some authors point out that care is an attribute that is part of women's lives, while men, in turn, feel challenged to enter this universe,

mainly because of the cultural barrier that needs to be broken.

A survey conducted by the Federal Nursing Council (COFEN) in 2015⁹, covering 1.6 million nursing professionals in Brazil, indicates that of these, 84.6% are women. Despite this, the same survey indicates that a trend towards the “masculinization” of nursing has been occurring since the 1990s. Another study, which aimed to characterize the CAPES BDTD, published in 2015, showed that 90% of nursing theses and dissertations were published by women.¹⁰ This study is in line with the statistics. It is clear that although we live in a society where more and more men and women occupy the same space, women still make up the vast majority in the postgraduate nursing program at UNIFAL-MG.

Public universities are responsible for a significant portion of scientific production in Brazil. Professors, researchers and students are involved in research projects that cover a wide variety of areas. This production of knowledge contributes to the country's advancement in different fields of knowledge. In its first decade, PPGENF produced scientific studies in a diverse, intense and irregular manner in terms of annual frequency.

Recognizing the dynamic nature of science leads us to value the need to continue to employ, whenever necessary,

different research designs to achieve the proposed objectives and scientific advancement in Nursing. Research is characterized as “the basic activity of science, in its inquiry and construction of reality”. Therefore, the construction of a scientific field and social practice such as nursing, as well as its updating in relation to the reality of the world, needs to be constantly fed by research.¹¹

The research within the scope of PPGENF UNIFAL-MG was predominantly in the two scenarios in which the professional performance of nursing is most developed, currently contained in the health care network. With its level of primary health care, represented by the Family Health Strategy, and the level of greater technological density that occupies the tertiary level constituted by hospital institutions, with both directing the research population to patients. Thus, it is evident that the dedication in the production of knowledge by nurses is directed to the care field, meeting the profession's vocation of seeking answers to practical questions that involve the care of users of health services.¹²

Research design is used as a guide for planning, implementing, and analyzing a study. It is considered the tool for answering the research question or hypothesis. Different types of research questions or hypotheses require different

types of approaches. Therefore, researchers must know how to explore and understand the types of research designs that exist and are available. When choosing a research design, the author has three main options: qualitative studies, quantitative studies, and a mixture of both, which can be called a mixed study.¹³

Within quantitative studies, the Descriptive Analytical design, present in 23 dissertations, was the most addressed by the authors. In descriptive research, researchers record the characteristics of a specific population or phenomenon, in addition to being able to establish connections between variables. For this purpose, they observe, count, sketch, elucidate and classify, highlighting the prevalence, incidence, size and other measurable attributes of the object under analysis.¹⁴ Analytical research consists of a more detailed analysis of the data collected in a specific study. Its objective is to provide a deeper understanding of the context of a phenomenon in a group or population.¹⁵

Research designs with a quantitative approach bring the idea that reality can be discovered through a probabilistic sense, and interpreted with the help of different methodologies.¹³ It becomes possible to identify the deep nature of realities, their system of relationships and their dynamic structure. In this type of project, it is interesting to include evidence-based

practice studies, which help to prove the efficiency and effectiveness of safe nursing interventions. They are used in epidemiological investigations, as well as in studies on Health Policies and Systems, which in some designs can be developed as mixed studies, with a quantitative and qualitative approach, given their interdisciplinary nature, encompassing aspects of economics, sociology, anthropology, political science, public health and epidemiology that, in total, encompass how health systems respond and adapt to changes. These studies that use the quantitative approach bring important contributions to the health care of populations.¹⁶

Within qualitative studies, the Ethnographic design, present in 12 dissertations, was the most used by the authors. The ethnographic method focuses on the study of groups from a cultural perspective. This approach provides access to health beliefs and practices based on culture or subculture, thus facilitating the understanding of behaviors that influence the health-disease process.¹⁴ In ethnographic research, the result generally consists of a rich, dense and holistic description of the culture studied. This is because this approach takes into account the interpretation of culture, that is, the description of normative behavior and social patterns.¹⁴ Research designs with a

qualitative approach aim to answer very specific questions, being based on the naturalistic paradigm. It has a more inductive than deductive approach. It seeks to delve into the world of the singularity of human relationships and actions, a side to which equations, averages and statistics are not easily applied.¹¹

The methodological approach, which is defined together with the type of research, has the role of helping to understand and achieve the objectives of the study. It provides the necessary tools for collecting, analyzing and interpreting data, allowing the control of relevant results. It is important to emphasize that the methodological approach must be rigorous and transparent, allowing other researchers to reproduce the study and verify the validity of the results. In addition, the appropriate choice of methodology is essential to ensure the reliability and validity of the data obtained, as well as the transition to the area of study in question.

An important aspect when submitting a scientific paper for publication is the definition of descriptors. These terms have significant value for indexing, since many researchers in the health field use them when searching for information about diseases, surgical techniques or when writing an academic paper, seeking to delimit a specific field of science. It is essential that these descriptors comply with

the nomenclature of the databases, otherwise the article runs the risk of not being found and, consequently, not being cited.¹⁷

If the author does not use descriptors properly, this situation can result in considerable losses, since the prestige of a journal and of the authors, whose articles are published in its pages, is directly linked to the number of citations. This phenomenon is known as the "impact factor", which represents the relationship between the number of times a journal's articles are cited and the total number of articles published worldwide. The greater the number of citations, the greater the impact factor attributed to the journal. In view of this, the impact factor is an attribute that, among others, defines the importance of the journal among its peers, research funding agencies and government agencies such as CAPES.¹⁷

In the case of the most frequent words in the title and abstract of dissertations, raised through statistical analysis. The results show that the most employable words are those that represent the main objective of the dissertations, such as "understand", "evaluate", "analyze" and "evaluation".

CONCLUSION

During the research, it was highlighted that postgraduate studies in

nursing play a fundamental role in the career of nurses. They provide opportunities to expand knowledge, improve skills, and deepen their knowledge in areas of expertise. They play an essential role in training highly qualified nurses who are prepared to face the complex challenges of today's healthcare. In addition to improving knowledge and skills, this educational stage contributes to the development of the profession and the improvement of healthcare provided to society as a whole.

With the work of characterizing the dissertations presented to PPGENF UNIFAL-MG, it became possible to verify the female predominance in the program, observe the potential in the most worked Lines of Research, as well as types of study, methodological approach and themes.

Throughout the study, possible limitations of the scientific production of PPGENF UNIFAL-MG were also addressed. Such as the low production in three specific themes, communicable diseases, health of the elderly, development of technologies and innovation in health. In addition, there was a lack of work in five priority axes, pharmaceutical assistance, post-incorporation evaluation, indigenous health, health economics and management, and health of the black population and traditional communities. The importance of overcoming these barriers was highlighted,

pointing out the need for strategic planning on health research priorities.

It is inferred that this diagnosis can be used to guide the planning of the PPGENF UNIFAL-MG in the development of actions aimed at improving it for the next four years. It is suggested that different types of studies on the production of the program be carried out periodically, under different aspects, in order to enhance reflection on its contribution to science, to the resolution of the demands of Brazilian society regarding health and to professional appreciation in all its fields of activity. Finally, the completion of this course work hopes to have contributed to the professional and academic development of Brazilian nursing.

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