

LEPROSY IN CHILDREN UNDER 15 YEARS OLD: A LITERATURE REVIEW
HANSENÍASE EM MENORES DE 15 ANOS: UMA REVISÃO BIBLIOGRÁFICA
LEPRA EN MENORES DE 15 AÑOS: UNA REVISIÓN DE LITERATURA

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This study aims to identify and analyze the national scientific production on leprosy in children under 15 years old, from 2004 to 2014. We conducted a literature search through online search, at the Virtual Health Library and at LILACS, Scielo and Pubmed databases, using the descriptors: leprosy; child; teenager. In a total of 17 studies found, 11 of them used a quantitative approach. The doctors and the Southeast region were the ones that most developed research on the subject. The average of publication from 2004 to 2014 was one to two articles per year. Although 16 articles have shown clarity on their goals, there was lack of information in the abstracts of 10 studies. There is shortage of national publications on the issue of leprosy in children under 15 years old, it is clear, therefore, that there is a need to expand research on this topic in Brazil.

Descriptors: Leprosy; Child; Adolescent.

Este estudo tem como objetivo identificar e analisar a produção científica nacional acerca da hanseníase em menores de 15 anos, no período de 2004 a 2014. Realizou-se pesquisa bibliográfica por meio de busca online, na Biblioteca Virtual em Saúde e nas bases de dados LILACS, Scielo, Pubmed, empregando-se os descritores: hanseníase; criança; adolescente. Em um total de 17 estudos encontrados, 11 deles utilizaram abordagem quantitativa. Os médicos e a região Sudeste foram os que mais desenvolveram pesquisas sobre o tema. A média de publicação de 2004 a 2014 foi de um a dois artigos por ano. Embora 16 artigos tenham apresentado clareza em seus objetivos, observou-se em 10 estudos, carência de informações em seus resumos. Há escassez de publicações nacionais sobre a problemática da hanseníase em menores de 15 anos, conclui-se, portanto, que existe a necessidade de expandir no Brasil pesquisas sobre essa temática.

Descritores: Hanseníase; Criança; Adolescente.

El objetivo de este estudio es identificar y analizar la producción científica brasileña sobre lepra en menores de 15 años, del 2004 al 2014, se realizó una investigación *online*, en la Biblioteca Virtual en Salud y en las bases de datos LILACS, Scielo, Pubmed, empleando los descriptors: lepra; niños; adolescente. Se encontraron 17 estudios, 11 de ellos utilizaron un enfoque cuantitativo. Los médicos y la región Sudeste resultaron los que más investigaron sobre el tema. La publicación promedio de 2004 a 2014 durante uno o dos artículos por año. 16 estudios presentaron claridad en sus objetivos, se observó que a 10, les faltaban informaciones en sus resúmenes. Nacionalmente se carece de publicaciones sobre este tema. Por lo que se concluye que existe en Brasil la necesidad de ampliar la investigación en esta temática.

Descritores: Lepra; Niño; Adolescente.

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INTRODUCTION

Leprosy or Hansen's disease is considered one of the oldest diseases and bears the mark of prejudice and exclusion throughout its history¹. Many authors have reported that the association of the disease with the term "leprosy", considered contagious, mutilating and incurable, still remains in the minds of the people, being crucial to the maintenance of prejudice and psychosocial problems related to the disease, bringing fear and suffering to patients¹⁻⁴.

Hansen's disease has not been eliminated in Brazil, constituting a public health problem. Despite the prevalence of the disease in the world have shown reduction in recent years, Brazil has registered about 33,000 new cases of leprosy per year, and 7% of them in individuals under 15 years old, holding the position of the second country with the largest number of cases the world, second only to India⁵.

The causative agent of leprosy called *Mycobacterium leprae* primarily affects eyes, hands and feet due to its predilection for skin and peripheral nerves. The Hansen bacillus is considered high infectious, but low pathogenicity since most of the infected people do not develop the disease^{5,6}.

The main route for bacillus elimination are the upper airways and although this disease has already occurred in animals like the armadillo and monkey, the man is considered the only source of infection^{6,7}. Among the signs and symptoms of leprosy, it is highlighted paresthesia sensations at extremities and/or white or reddish spots with altered sensitivity, impairment of peripheral nerves, plates, infiltration, nodules, etc^{2,4}. This disease is potentially incapacitating and if not diagnosed and treated early, can lead to severe physical disabilities⁸.

With the introduction of multidrug therapy regimens (MDT) consisting of a drug combination, it is now known that leprosy is curable and its diagnosis is essentially clinical, but when necessary, other additional tests are performed⁵. Treatment

of leprosy must be done in basic health units and, in severe cases, in more complex units^{5,6}. It is essential the practice of effective comprehensive care in an interdisciplinary approach, which goes beyond the merely biological look⁹.

The presence of the disease in children and adolescents is an important epidemiological indicator because it reflects the expansion of the endemic, making it therefore priority of the *Programa Nacional de Controle da doença* (National Program for Control of the disease)⁵. Although leprosy is rare in children, the age group of 10 years old is the most affected due the long incubation period of the disease, on average of 5 to 7 years, in addition to the prolonged contact with household infection focus^{10,11}.

Children and adolescents affected by leprosy may be impacted physically, emotionally and socially. Nakae¹ adds in this context that the experience of the disease in this age group may be marked by changes in activities of daily living, practical life and leisure activities, due to the clinical manifestations of leprosy, adverse pharmacological effects and the prejudice suffered.

Corroborating these statements, Ponte and Ximenes Neto¹² conducted a survey of 31 adolescents diagnosed with leprosy, and the results showed that the symptoms of the disease and the side effects of medication had significant interference in the daily lives of these adolescents. It was emphasized also that the existence of prejudice against the disease also contributed to the changes in social life and hurt self-esteem and mental health of adolescents.

The high number of cases of leprosy in children under 15 years old points to the need to strengthen and/or implement measures to prevent and control the disease specific to this age group. However, it is critical that an early diagnosis of leprosy is made, preventing this transmission chain to perpetuate and contaminate these children and adolescents, causing suffering beyond pain and discomfort related to physical injury, which causes great social and

psychological impact¹³. It is also important to note that the shortage of publications, in particular the national ones, involving the issue of leprosy in children under 15 years old justifies the interest in developing a bibliographic review on scientific production involving this issue, in order to assist in the development of future investigations. Also, moving in this direction may bring contributions so that health policies and actions can include more subjects for which they are directed, providing improvements in their lives.

Thus, this study aims to identify and analyze the national scientific production on leprosy in children under 15 years old, from 2004 to 2014.

METHOD

This study was conducted through online search of national scientific production on leprosy in children under 15 years old from 2004 to 2014. We performed a bibliographical survey in the Virtual Health Library (VHL), and used the databases: Latin American and Caribbean Health Sciences (LILACS), Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), and the journal *Hansenologia Internationalis*, because it is a magazine that addresses specific issues about the disease and it is not indexed in databases above. The following descriptors were employed: leprosy; child and adolescent.

According to Trentini and Paim^{14:24}, the bibliographic review or literature review is defined as a source of information for the literature research. This research includes studies that "propose the construction of theories and conceptual frameworks through deductive method, studies conducted to draw a picture of the knowledge produced or the blank spaces in certain phenomena".

It was established for the sample selection Brazilian articles published from 2004 to 2014 that presented explicitly in their titles and/or abstracts the issue of leprosy in children under 15 old, regardless of research method. Articles that only mentioned this theme, whose main objective

was not directed only to leprosy in children under 15 years old, were excluded.

Then we proceeded to read the collected material. It is identified 18 works. One study was excluded because it was published before 2004. Thus, the final sample consisted of 17 scientific articles, for they were related to the theme, met the proposed objective and matched the established inclusion criteria.

A data collection form was developed considering specific information of each article, related to authorship, location, year of publication, source of localization, abstract, objectives, design and characteristics of the study, data collection instruments, data analysis, results, discussion and conclusion. This worksheet was organized according to the year of publication of the articles. From this organization we proceeded to content analysis of selected articles.

RESULTS

Studies selected in the literature review were classified and analyzed according to the following criteria: journal and year of publication, authors' profession, research location, presentation of abstracts, objectives of the studies, type of methodology, data collection instruments, data analysis and results. At the end, there was a synthesis of the findings obtained by the surveyed studies discussed in Table I.

The *Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem* and the *Hansenologia Internationalis* journal had a higher number of publications in the field of interest with three (03) studies each, followed by the *Revista Brasileira de Epidemiologia* with two (02) studies. The other articles were published in different magazines. The elected descriptors were present in the titles of thirteen (13) studies.

Regarding the year of publication, from 2004 to 2014 there was an average of one to two papers published per year. However, in 2008 we found three (03) studies and in 2006, only, no works were identified.

Table 1: Publications according to year, authors, title and journal. 2004 to 2014.

Year	Article	Journal
2004	ARAÚJO, M.G. et al. Detection of leprosy in the age group of 0 to 14 years old in Belo Horizonte from 1992 to 1999: implications for control	Rev. méd. Minas Gerais
2005	FERREIRA, I.N.; ALVAREZ, R.R.A. Leprosy in children under fifteen years old in Paracatu, MG (1994 to 2001)	Rev Bras Epidemiol
2005	PONTE, K.M.A.; NETO XIMENES, F.R.G. Leprosy: the reality of being a teenager	Rev Bras Enferm
2007	LANA, F.C.F. et al. Leprosy in children under 15 years old in Vale do Jequitinhonha, Minas Gerais, Brazil	Rev Bras Enferm
2007	FERREIRA, I.N.; EVANGELISTA, M.S.N.; ALVAREZ, R.R.A. Spatial distribution of leprosy among school children in Paracatu - Minas Gerais, held by active search (2004 to 2006)	Rev Bras Epidemiol
2008	ALENCAR, C.H.M. et al. Leprosy in Fortaleza, CE, Brazil: epidemiological and operational aspects in children under 15 years old (1995-2006)	Rev Bras Enferm
2008	IMBIRIBA, E.B. et al. Epidemiology of leprosy in children under fifteen years of age, Manaus (AM), 1998-2005	Rev Saúde Pública
2008	FERREIRA, I.N. et al. Use of ML Flow test in school children diagnosed with leprosy in the city of Paracatu, Minas Gerais	Rev. Soc. Bras. Med. Trop.
2009	COSTA, A.L.F.; OLIVEIRA, M.L.W.D.R. Failures on epidemiological surveillance of leprosy: 4 MB cases in children in the state of PI	Hansen Int
2009	BARBIERI, C.L.A.; MARQUES, H.H.S. Leprosy in children and adolescents: literature review and current situation in Brazil	Rev Paul Pediatr
2010	FLACH, D.M.A.M. et al. Analysis of Historical Series in the period from 2001 to 2009 of leprosy cases in children under 15 years old in the state of Rio de Janeiro	Hansen Int
2011	SOUZA, V.F.M. et al. Report of three new cases of leprosy in children under fifteen years old in the municipality of Itaguaí, Rio de Janeiro - alert event for epidemiological research	An Bras Dermatol
2011	SANTINO, L.S. et al. Reactional borderline leprosy in children	Hansen Int
2012	PIRES, C.A.A. et al. Leprosy in children under 15 years old: the importance of contact test	Rev Paul Pediatr
2013	Prata, A. C. S. ; Silva, G. R. C. ; Mendes, M. e cols. Diagnosis and management of leprosy in children's age group - with regard to a case	Revista SPDV
2013	Sousa, B. R. M. et. al. Health education and active search for cases of leprosy in a public school in Ananindeua, Para, Brazil	Rev Bras Med Fam Comunidade
2014	Neder, L. et. Al. Musculoskeletal manifestations and autoantibodies in children and adolescents with leprosy	J Pediatr

With regard to the authors' profession, most are physicians, three (03) are nurses, and there is also the participation of other professionals, such as: one pharmacist (01), and one (01) social worker. Three (03) studies were carried out by the *Fundação Nacional de Saúde* (National Health Foundation – FUNASA in Portuguese) and three (03) studies were tied to Federal and State Universities.

Most studies were developed in the Southeast (10 studies), followed by the Northeast (03 studies), North (03 studies) and one (01) in the Midwest. There were no works found in the South region.

Although sixteen (16) articles showed clearly the purpose of the study, it was observed in ten (10) studies lack of information on their abstracts, such as type of study, collection instrument and data analysis.

The methodological paths taken were demonstrated clearly in 15 articles, and, in the other two studies, the authors only highlighted the marking steps of the methodology for the performance of research.

On the most frequent design of researches in the sample studied, eleven (11) articles used the quantitative approach,

five (05) developed studies with qualitative methods and (01) used the mixed method.

On analyzing the methodological approach, there were five (05) case studies, one (01) literature review and eleven (11) epidemiological studies, including ecological, cross-sectional, cohort study and descriptive.

Among the data collection instruments used there was predominance of secondary data collected from the *Sistema de Informação de Agravos de Notificação* (Notifiable Diseases Information System – SINAN in Portuguese) (05 studies), which is specific for leprosy cases in the age group

population from 0 to 14 years old. Two studies also consulted the online database of the *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics – IBGE in Portuguese) to obtain the data. The other studies used a variety of instruments such as questionnaire, form, tests, observation and semi-structured interview. Only one article did not point the tool used for data collection. Concerning data analysis technique, in most of the studies the authors used the statistical analysis, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Publications according to type of study, collection instrument and data analysis.

Article	Type of study	Data collection instrument	Data analysis
Detection of leprosy in the age group of 0 to 14 years old in Belo Horizonte from 199 to 1999: implications for control	Cross-sectional descriptive	Leprosy case reporting forms	Database created using EPI INFO software (version 6.01)
Leprosy in children under fifteen years old in Paracatu, MG (1994 to 2001)	Epidemiological descriptive study	Data collection instrument was not identified	Descriptive analysis of data and of the Wilcoxon test for nonparametric data.
Leprosy: the reality of being a teenager	Exploratory and descriptive study	Medical records, socio-demographic and characterizing the disease questionnaire and semi-structured interview	Data analysis was not identified
Leprosy in children under 15 years old in Vale do Jequitinhonha, Minas Gerais, Brazil	Ecological cross-sectional study	Notification forms of cases of leprosy and consultation in the online databases of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) and of DATASUS/MS	Database created using EPI INFO software (version 6.01) and analysis of the strength of association between the two age groups (under and over 15 years old) and the variables Sex, Disability Presence, Operational Classification and how it was discovered.
Spatial distribution of leprosy among school children in Paracatu - Minas Gerais, held by active search (2004 to 2006)	Epidemiological study of prospective cohort and ecological type.	Lecture on leprosy in schools. Simplified dermato-neurological examination in suspected cases, medical evaluation plus PGL-1/ML FLOW immune examination	Database construction using Excel software and non-parametric analysis of the x2 test, in addition to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov, Confidence Interval (CI: 95%) and Relative Risk (RR) and Auto CAD 2000 release software
Leprosy in Fortaleza, CE, Brazil: epidemiological and operational aspects in children under 15 years old (1995-2006)	Cross-sectional interrelational study	Secondary data from the Notifiable Diseases Information System (SINAN) and from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE)	TabWin software (DATASUS) and Excel (Microsoft ®)
Epidemiology of leprosy	Descriptive,	Secondary data from the	EpiInfo 3.3.2 Program

in children under fifteen years of age, Manaus (AM), 1998-2005	retrospective study	Notifiable Diseases Information System (SINAN)	
Use of ML Flow test in school children diagnosed with leprosy in the city of Paracatu, Minas Gerais	Epidemiological study of descriptive and exploratory type of epidemiological, clinical and laboratory data.	Lecture on leprosy in schools. Simplified dermato-neurological examination in suspected cases, medical evaluation plus PGL-1/ML FLOW immune examination	Database construction using Excel software and non-parametric analysis of the x2 test, in addition to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov, Confidence Interval (CI: 95%)
Failures on epidemiological surveillance of leprosy: 4 MB cases in children in the state of PI	Study of clinical cases of leprosy in family contacts	Physical examination performed by dermatologists	
Leprosy in children and adolescents: literature review and current situation in Brazil	Literature review	PubMed and official websites of Ministry of Health of Brazil and the World Health Organization	
Analysis of Historical Series in the period from 2001 to 2009 of leprosy cases in children under 15 years old in the state of Rio de Janeiro	Retrospective study	Secondary data from the Notifiable Diseases Information System (SINAN)	TABWIN application, and later transference to Excel
Report of three new cases of leprosy in children under fifteen years old in the municipality of Itaguaí, Rio de Janeiro - alert event for epidemiological research	Case study	Physical and histopathological examination	
Reactional borderline leprosy in children	Case study	Household contacts examination, physical examination, histopathological examination and Mitsuda test.	
Leprosy in children under 15 years old: the importance of contact test	Case study	Household contacts examination, physical examination, skin smear bacilloscopy, histopathological examination	
Diagnosis and management of leprosy in children's age group - with regard to a case	Case study	Physical examination	
Health education and active search for cases of leprosy in a public school in Ananindeua, Para, Brazil	Descriptive study	Lecture in classrooms about the disease, clinical examination in suspected cases and sociodemographic questionnaire	Microsoft Office Excel 2007 software
Musculoskeletal manifestations and autoantibodies in children and adolescents with leprosy	Cross-sectional study	Musculoskeletal examination, clinical examination of leprosy, visual analogue scale (VAS), Childhood Health Assessment Questionnaire (CHAQ), laboratory tests (autoantibodies and cryoglobulins)	Student's t test or Mann-Whitney test and Fisher's exact test

All (100%) works showed clearly the results. They were consistent with the developed theme and responded to the issues raised in the study, facilitating better understanding of the reader.

DISCUSSION

Despite the leprosy detection rate in children under 15 years old be considered high according to WHO⁵, there has been lack of publications on this topic in Brazil. Development of new studies could contribute to the dissemination of knowledge about the disease, with focus on children and adolescents diagnosed with leprosy.

Due to the complexity of the disease, it is unquestionable the importance of interdisciplinary team qualified to care for people affected by the disease. Some studies evidence the existence of a weakness in health practices aimed at collective approach to leprosy. However, we stress that different categories of professionals, especially health, should be involved in research projects aimed at improvements in the care and quality of life of these patients¹⁵.

According to epidemiological data from the Ministry of Health in 2012¹⁶, the South region has the lowest leprosy detection rate in children under 15 years old of the country (0.9/100,000 inhabitants), which probably explains the lack of research in this region. However, in contrast, the Southeast region is in second place, and was the one with the largest number of publications. It is identified the need for further research, especially in regions where the detection rate of new cases of leprosy in children under 15 years old is still high, as in the North and Northeast, since both regions showed small numbers of publications.

We looked carefully to the composition of abstracts of the papers, whose guidance and requirement of its preparation includes indicating a brief introduction of the topic, a brief description of the research techniques used and the results found. Most summaries presented lack of information especially on the data collection and analysis (10 works). Only one

article did not present the results on its abstract. This item is extremely important in an article, because it is a synthesis of the key components of the study methodology and major findings of the research.

In 92% (n=16) of the studies the objective was clearly presented, that is, allowed the easy understanding of the reader. According Creswell¹⁷, the objective is the most important step in a study because it is based on it that all other steps of the research ensue from. On the objective the purpose, intention and the main idea of a study are established. Researchers should explain it clearly, to achieve specific purposes that will respond to their research problem, showing care in the organization of their work.

After detailed reading of the articles, we tried to understand the methodological paths that the authors followed for the construction of their work. In fifteen (15) studies that step was clearly set, while in two (2) studies, the authors only highlighted the major steps of the methodology for the implementation of research. Marconi and Lakatos¹⁸ claim that the method is the set of systematic and rational activities that will enable achieving the goal. The nature of the problem is essential for the proper choice of research method. Thus, it is considered that the higher the transparency and accuracy in the development of the study, the greater the degree of validity attributed to the results.

On the design study design, it is known that quantitative studies predict the measurement of pre-set variables. It is used deductive reasoning, in which the researcher begins the study plan with a theory and then collects evidence in order to test or verify this theory¹⁷. In contrast, in qualitative studies the research process is inductive. Researcher begins with broader exploration goals and seeks the theory as a source of explanation for behavior and attitudes, which can also be supplemented with variables, constructs and hypotheses¹⁷. In mixed or multiple methods, on the other hand, there is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods within the same study¹⁹.

The target of interest for researchers who use qualitative study designs focused on the context of human sciences and health is not the phenomenon itself, but the "*meaning that this phenomenon has for those experiencing it*"²⁰. Thus, considering the large number of quantitative research in this study sample, we identify the need for further qualitative approach studies in order to investigate the feelings, ideas and behaviors of children and adolescents with leprosy, understanding what the disease phenomenon means to them.

Epidemiology uses quantitative methods to study the occurrence of disease in the population and to define the prevention and control strategies²¹. In ecological study, the analysis units are groups of people and not the isolated individual. Data can be obtained from various sources and from different populations. In cross-sectional studies the main objective is to measure the prevalence of the disease. These studies are relatively inexpensive and easier to conduct, unlike cohort studies that are quite expensive because they require long periods of monitoring²¹. The latter aims to compare a group of people with the disease (cases) with another group without the disease (controls). Cohort studies are important to provide information about the etiology, as well as the most direct measures of the risk of developing it²¹. In the descriptive studies researcher seeks to study the distribution of disease in a given location. For this it is performed hypotheses formulation and it is used some variables to assist the study. Data collection may be done by primary or secondary sources²¹.

All these types of epidemiological studies are an important source for information about the problem of leprosy in children under 15 years old. For this reason, such studies remain essential, as they allow contributing to the development of prevention and control of the disease and health promotion.

Among the studies that used the qualitative methodological approach, the report or case study was the method used.

The case study is defined as the one that examines a phenomenon in its natural environment, by applying various data collection methods in order to obtain information from one or more entities²². Among the advantages of the case study, there is the possibility to study in depth some aspect of the problem within a limited period of time, to stimulate new discoveries and it is still appropriate to explore atypical or extreme cases to better understand the typical processes²². The main limitation of the case study is the difficulty of generalizing the data.

Submission and approval of research projects by an Ethics Committee were mentioned in only seven jobs. This is explained by the fact that most studies have not had the involvement of human beings, and most of the data was obtained through secondary sources, such as the Notifiable Diseases Information System (SINAN). Importantly, according to the Resolution 466/12, all research involving human subjects must be submitted to ethical evaluation²³. In cases not viable to obtain consent, the researcher must ensure the confidentiality of information provided.

Leprosy is a reportable and mandatory research disease nationwide. With the structuring of the *Sistema Nacional de Vigilância Epidemiológica no Brasil* National Epidemiological Surveillance System in Brazil it became mandatory the notification of some communicable diseases, with the aim of reducing the detection and prevalence rates of these diseases in the country, in order to contribute to the improvement of population health¹⁶. Each diagnosed case should be reported by professionals of the health units. They use a notification and investigation form, of the SINAN. The notification must be sent to the epidemiological surveillance authority, remaining a copy in the patient's medical record. SINAN has become an important tool to compile data for operational research, but unfortunately still cannot be used exclusively for a scientific work, given the typos and difficulties in fully trust its data.

Statistical analysis prevailed as data analysis technique in the studies analyzed. Tables and graphs presented clearly a summary of the data found, making the results most consistent. Only one study did not explicitly indicate the method of analysis used. The processes of analysis and interpretation of data vary according to the study design. In quantitative studies, usually the collected data is statistically analyzed with computer and statistical software assistance. In qualitative research, analysis is performed during and after the data collection and the results are depicted through categories, meaning units, or other type of analysis according to the theory on which it is based.

The results of a study should clearly present its findings. In this review all works clearly presented their results and led the reader to understand the path taken to respond to the objective and thus they are consistent to the developed theme.

Results presented in several articles have been varied, however, in most studies the authors pointed out in their conclusions the importance of active search in the population under 15 years old, especially through the contacts of the patients for the early detection of suspected cases to prevent sequel and injuries resulting from late diagnosis and also the damage suffered due to social stigma²⁴.

The high detection in children under 15 years old reveals the persistent transmission of the bacillus and the difficulties of health programs for disease control²⁵. Also, another point raised was the need to intensify and/or implement prevention and control actions for leprosy specific to this age group, and to update the health teams and dissemination of signs and symptoms of this disease in the population.

CONCLUSION

On reviewing the national scientific literature on leprosy in children under 15 years old, we found that, although most of the articles had presented clearly their objectives and appropriate study designs, some abstracts did not expose clearly and

concisely the most relevant information of the work.

It is important to highlight the need for researchers in other areas of knowledge, given that most authors focused on the physician. It is important to remember that leprosy is still a serious public health problem, hence different specialties should be involved in prevention and control of this disease, developing a critical analysis of the practical context, so that the emergence of questions can be transformed in research issues, and thus contributing to the expansion of knowledge on leprosy and generating changes in the current scenario.

After the characterization of refereed publications, it is highlighted the need for further research, mainly qualitative approach, contributing to a more depth look on children and adolescents affected by leprosy, in order to understand the meaning of the disease, their experiences and meaning of this experience to the person as well as to their family, friends and professionals involved.

Finally, tracing an overview of the sample studied, we conclude that research on leprosy in children under 15 years old should be expanded in Brazil, due to the small production found, in order to promote the deconstruction of archaic beliefs about the disease, in order to improve care and also to prevent any losses that leprosy may bring to these people's lives.

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CONTRIBUTIONS

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