

**Religion, spirituality and nursing**  
**Religião, espiritualidade e a enfermagem**  
**Religión, espiritualidad y enfermería**

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**Gina Andrade Abdala<sup>1</sup>**  
**Maria Dyrce Dias Meira<sup>2</sup>**  
**Sara Lidiane Santos da Silva Oliveira<sup>3</sup>**  
**Daniela da Cunha dos Santos<sup>4</sup>**

This study aimed at investigating the knowledge published by periodicals on religion and spirituality in nursing. This is an Integrative Review of the Literature, including articles published between 2010 and 2015 in periodicals available in Brazil. The databases LILACS and BDEnf were researched, using the terms "religion", "spirituality" and "nursing". 27 articles were chosen, from which only 13 were used, as they meet the objectives of the study. The articles were grouped by thematic areas: spirituality in nursing education (46.2%), spirituality in the clinical practice of nursing (38.5%) and the meaning of spirituality in nursing (15.3%). Despite the existing knowledge regarding the theme spirituality and nursing both in education and in the clinical field, literature points out that these professionals do not feel prepared to offer spiritual assistance for their patients - which is an essential aspect of health promotion.

**Descritores:** Religião; Espiritualidade; Enfermagem.

Este estudo teve como objetivo investigar o conhecimento divulgado nas publicações sobre religião e espiritualidade na enfermagem. Trata-se de uma Revisão Integrativa de Literatura de artigos publicados entre 2010 e 2015 com produções disponíveis em periódicos do Brasil. Recorreu-se às bases de dados LILACS e BDEnf, utilizando os termos "religião", "espiritualidade" e "enfermagem". Foram escolhidos 27 artigos, dos quais somente 13 foram utilizados por atenderem ao objetivo do estudo. Os artigos foram agrupados por áreas temáticas: espiritualidade na formação do enfermeiro (46,2%), espiritualidade na prática clínica da enfermagem (38,5%) e o significado da espiritualidade na enfermagem (15,3%). Apesar do reconhecimento do tema sobre espiritualidade e a enfermagem na formação e na área clínica, a literatura aponta que esses profissionais não se sentem preparados para dar assistência espiritual aos pacientes, aspecto essencial para a promoção da saúde.

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Este estudio tuvo como objetivo investigar el conocimiento divulgado en las publicaciones sobre religión y espiritualidad en la enfermería. Se trata de una Revisión Integrativa de Literatura de artículos publicados entre 2010 y 2015 con producciones disponibles en periódicos de Brasil. Se recurrió a las bases de datos LILACS y BDEnf, utilizando los términos "religião", "espiritualidade" y "enfermagem". Fueron elegidos 27 artículos, de los cuales solo 13 fueron utilizados por atender el objetivo del estudio. Los artículos fueron agrupados por áreas temáticas: espiritualidad en la formación del enfermero (46,2%), espiritualidad en la práctica clínica de la enfermería (38,5%) y el significado de la espiritualidad en la enfermería (15,3%). A pesar del reconocimiento del tema sobre espiritualidad y la enfermería en la formación y en el área clínica, la literatura apunta que estos profesionales no se sienten preparados para dar asistencia espiritual a los pacientes, aspecto esencial para la promoción de la salud.

**Descritores:** Religión; Espiritualidad; Enfermería.

<sup>1</sup>Nurse. Doctor's degree in Sciences. Professor of the Post-Graduate Program in Health Promotion of the Adventist University Center of São Paulo (UNASP), SP/Brazil. ORCID - 0000-0001-8015-0743 E-mail: [gina.abdala@ucb.org.br](mailto:gina.abdala@ucb.org.br). Brazil.

<sup>2</sup>Nurse. Doctor's degree in Sciences. Professor of the Post-Graduate Program in Health Promotion at the UNASP, SP/Brazil. ORCID - 0000-0001-6313-4637 E-mail: [dyrcem@yahoo.com.br](mailto:dyrcem@yahoo.com.br). Brazil.

<sup>3</sup>Nurse. Master's degree in Health Promotion at UNASP, SP/Brazil. ORCID - 0000-0001-8529-6776 E-mail: [sara.oliveira@ucb.org.br](mailto:sara.oliveira@ucb.org.br). Brazil.

<sup>4</sup>Nurse. Master's degree in Health Promotion at UNASP, SP/Brazil. ORCID - 0000-0002-2885-4185 E-mail: [dani.efmg@hotmail.com](mailto:dani.efmg@hotmail.com). Brazil.

## INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, there has been an increase in published works with the theme "religion, spirituality and health". However, it is necessary to develop this theme in the context of nursing. The historical connection between nursing and religion is ancient. "Nursing always had a strongly holistic tradition and nurses have been practicing it with sensitivity to the physical, psychosocial and spiritual needs of people"<sup>1</sup>.

Although not all nurses consider spiritual assistance as a priority in their work routine, this dimension is very important for the care they provide, as it is inherent to human nature<sup>2</sup>.

Spirituality is understood as "sensitivity or connection to religious values or spiritual things as opposed to material or mundane interests". Religion is "any doctrine which demands interpretation, compromise and faith, which allows for a practice with ethical, aesthetic and emotional objectives"<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, it is helpful to investigate how such concepts relate to nursing in Brazil, a profession with a recognized religious tradition.

A historical profile indicates that the nursing profession was practically born at church, when the Sisters of Charity of the order of Saint Vincent de Paul, in 1617 started summoning other catholic sisters to serve both at religious and regular hospitals. In 1789, there were more than 400 hospitals directed by them, in France alone<sup>4</sup>.

In 1830, a Lutheran preacher set up a nursing school in Germany, training women who were called Protestant Deaconesses. In 1837, upon receiving a "call from God", Florence Nightingale sought training among the Sisters of Charity and the Protestant Deaconesses, starting to apply the principles she had learned. She is considered to be the founder of Modern Nursing<sup>4</sup>. Florence Nightingale had the habit of reading the Bible (according to pictures of the Florence Museum at the St. Thomas Hospital, in London). She would mention the care provided by God through the clean air that should be in the room of the ill, as well as in every house. However, people did not obey that guidance,

which led to diseases, cough and fevers. She used to say: "Let us see what God thinks of this. God always justifies His means. While we are thinking, He teaches. While He is teaching, you are not learning"<sup>5</sup>.

Florence Nightingale established as a basic foundation that nursing should be linked to religious principles, and that the nursing professional needed to know the teachings of several religious denominations, as well as the ability to care for the human mind through the development of religious values, considered fundamental for the preservation of mental health<sup>6</sup>.

However, despite the religious connotations that surround the act of caring since its beginnings, only from the start of scientific production in nursing a new vision emerged, based on the recognition of spiritual needs, whether or not the human being is religious<sup>6</sup>.

In the decades from 1950 to 1969, spirituality was linked to religion. From 1960 to 1970, the holistic point of view towards the human being was strengthened in nursing care with the development of nursing theories. From 1970 to 1999, this tendency has brought together ethical, bioethical and philosophical reflections, which tried to understand phenomena connected to spirituality as a part of basic human needs, both clients and of nursing professionals<sup>7</sup>.

Brazil is "a country with a colonizing religious root that profoundly marked the organization of the State, particularly that of health care"<sup>8</sup>. Currently, that root has influenced the directions taken by National Policies of Health Promotion<sup>9</sup>, which state the necessity of, "in the scope of health care, an integral health promotion, that becomes a strategy of health production", guiding the attention to the stories and life condition of each worker and user, respecting the subjects' singularity in social, economic, political and cultural contexts. From that point of view, religion/spirituality starts to be understood as an essential dimension for health care.

Given this historical context, it can be inferred that nursing, since its very origins, has excelled in approaching the spiritual dimension. This articles proposes to present published investigations that approach such knowledge and phenomena, considered to be of great importance for the caring process in nursing, as well as in health promotion.

## METHOD

Integrative review of the literature about religion, spirituality and nursing in Brazil. In order to elaborate this research, the following stages were followed: elaboration of the guiding question, research or sampling of literature, data collection, critical analysis of the studies included, discussion of the results and presentation of the review<sup>10,11</sup>.

The guiding question for the research was: what are the characteristics of the scientific literature production on religion, spirituality and nursing, in Brazil? The descriptors and Boolean operators used were the Portuguese words for spirituality OR religion AND nursing, contained in the Health Science Descriptors (DECs) of the Virtual Library in Health (BVS).

The inclusion criteria for this review were: articles published between 2010 and 2015 in productions available in Brazilian periodicals. References were excluded due to duplicates, and to thematic focuses that differed from those researched.

Data collection happened between June 06 and 19, 2016, in the data bases of the Virtual Library of Health (Bireme), that involved specifically Latin American and Caribbean Health Sciences Literature (LILACS) and the Nursing Data Base (BDEnf).

The categories adopted to classify the studies were based on Stetler et al<sup>12</sup>, who classifies on level 1: evidences resulting from meta-analysis of multiple clinical, controlled and randomized studies; level 2: evidences obtained through individual studies with an experimental design; level 3: semi-experimental study evidences; level 4: evidences from descriptive (non-experimental)

studies or those with a qualitative approach; level 5: evidences stemming from case or experience reports; and level 6: evidences based on the opinion of specialists.

The instrument used for data collection was a form that contained data about: identification (author, title, periodical, year); type of study and objective (if it is qualitative, quantitative, revision, or other); methodological characteristics studied, results and conclusion.

For the purpose of analyzing and organizing the theme spirituality OR religion AND nursing, the articles were grouped according to their thematic area: spirituality in nursing education; spirituality in clinical and nursing practice; and the meaning of spirituality for the nurse.

## RESULTS

Among the 2,124 references found in the Bireme website, only 462 were available. The chosen data bases were LILACS and BDEnf (159 articles). When only articles written in Portuguese were selected, 119 references were found. From these, 73 were among the years 2010 and 2016. After analyzing the abstracts, 46 were eliminated, since they approached different themes than those sought after, resulting in a total of 27 selected articles. In the second elimination process, only 13 articles were considered (Image 1).

Three review articles (23%) were found, as well as two (15.4%) reflection/editorial ones, the same number of quantitative ones, and six (46.2%) qualitative ones.

The periodicals which published articles about the theme were: Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem (n=2), Revista Gaúcha de Enfermagem (n=2), Revista de Enfermagem da UERJ (n=2), On Line Brazilian Journal of Nursing (n=1), Aquichan (n=1), Revista RENE (n=1), Einstein (n=1), Acta Paulista de enfermagem (n=1), CuidArte (n=1) and Texto e Contexto de enfermagem (n=1).

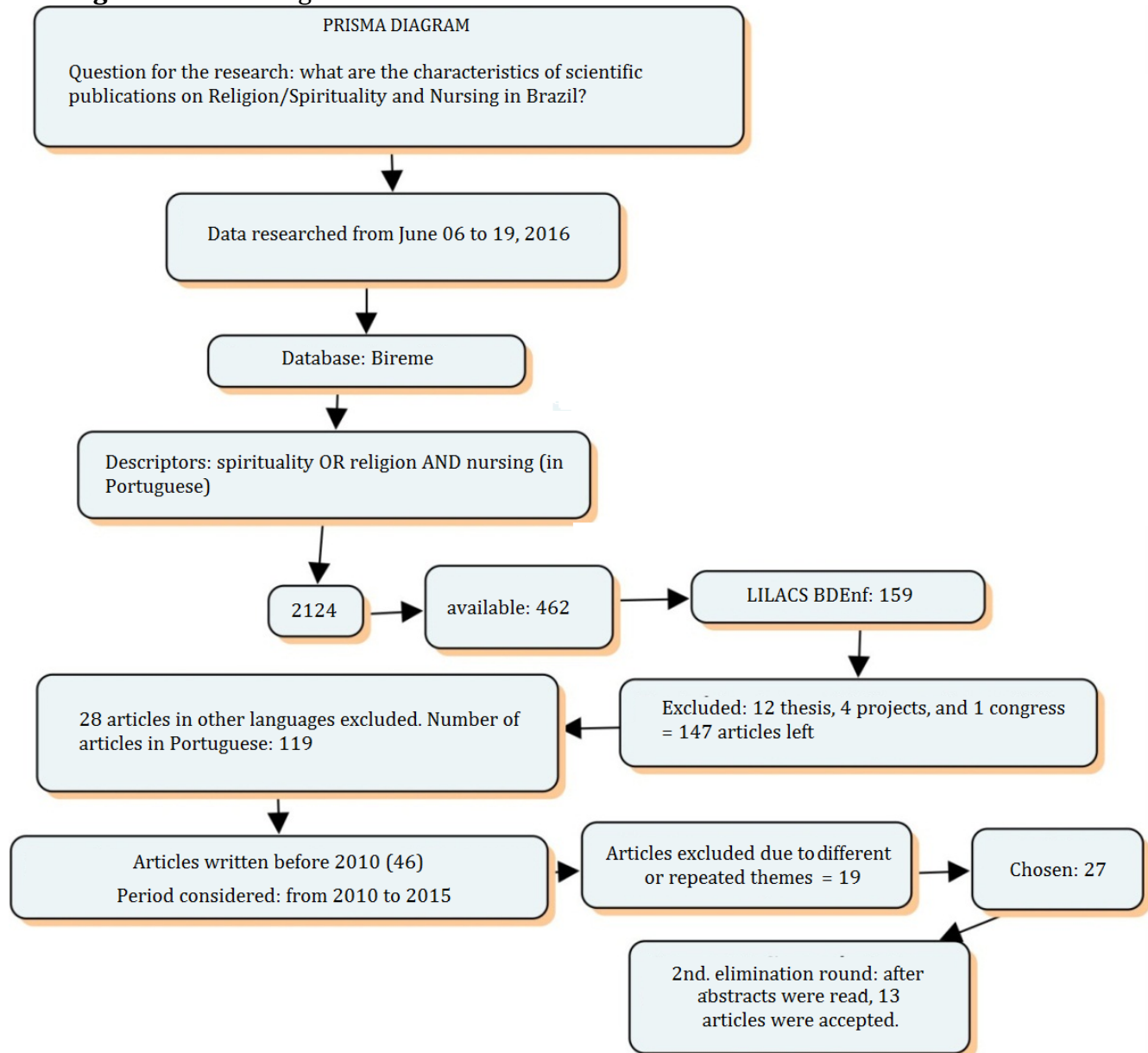
From these periodicals, only three are rated A2 at Web Qualis (2014). All the others are classified as B1 and B2.

Regarding the evidence level of the studies<sup>12</sup>, most of them (n = 11; 84.6%) were classified as level 4 studies: descriptive (non-experimental) or with a qualitative approach. A lesser number of level 6 articles were found (n = 2; 15.4%): reflections and specialist opinions.

Regarding the studied theme, from all publications (n = 13), the themes investigated

were classified as: spirituality in nursing education (46.2%), spirituality in nursing clinical practice (38.5%), and the meaning of spirituality in nursing (15.3%) (Table 1). For better understanding, the articles were described chronologically, allowing for a historical evolution within each theme.

**Image 1-** PRISMA diagram for the article elaboration.



**Table 1.** Articles about Religion, Spirituality and Nursing - 2010 to 2015 / Lilacs and BDEF, per category.

Article database	Authors	Title of the article	Source and year of publication	Type of study and objective	Type of sample	Variables of the phenomenon studied	Results and statistical analysis
<b>Articles on "Spirituality on nursing education"</b>							
LILACS 1	Pedrão RB, Beresin R	Nursing and spirituality	Einstein; 2010; 8(1):	<i>Cross-sectional</i> To evaluate the spiritual well-being of nurses, the importance of spirituality for patients, as well as the nurses professional training.	30 nurses from a Semi-Intensive Ward of the Albert Einstein Hospital - SP.	Spiritual well-being scale, Existential well-being, Religious well-being	The nurses were spiritually well, but did not have spiritual information with which to assist the patient.
BDEF 2	Cortez EA, Teixeira ER	The nurse in face of the client's religiosity	Rev Enferm UERJ, 2010; 18(1):114-9.	<i>Qualitative</i> Identifying religiosity in the lives of nurses; describing the way the nurses deal with their clients.	13 nurses at the Municipal Health Center of Rio de Janeiro	Categories: religion in the life of the nurse, relationship with the user	The presence of religion in the life of nurses was meaningful, as well as the cases of user religious experience. However, technical and scientific knowledge is needed.
LILACS 3	Nascimento LC, Oliveira FCS, Moreno MF Silva FM	Spiritual care: an essential component of the nurse practice in pediatric oncology	Acta paul Enferm. 2010; 23(3):437-40.	<i>Reflection article</i> Reflecting on spiritual care in pediatric oncology nursing.	Reflection	Health promotion of families who have children with cancer	Suggests elements for the professional training of nurses, so they can offer this type of care.
BDEF 4	Soler VM, Vicente EC, Gonçalves JC, Bocchini MJV, Galindo MF	Nursing and spirituality: a study bibliographic	CuidArte, Enferm, 2012; 6(2):91-100.	<i>Bibliographic review</i> To raise data on Spirituality and nursing from 2002 to 2012	Review	18 articles on spirituality and nursing were selected	It was evidence that there was a lack of a universal concept on spirituality, and of nurses' preparation in the practice of spiritual health.
LILACS 5	Espinha DCM, Camargo SM, Silva SPZ, Paveiqueires	Nursing students' opinions about health, spirituality and religiosity	Rev. Gaúcha enferm., 2013; 34(4):98-106.	<i>Cross-sectional</i> Identifying the opinions of nursing students regarding health, spirituality and	120 students interviewed		Of the 120 students, 76% believe that spirituality influences health, but only 10% feel prepared to discuss these aspects with the patient and 54% pointed out that

	S, Lucchetti G.			religiosity in academic training			the faculty does not offer subsidies to do so.
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BDEF 6	Carlos DJD, Germano RM, Padilha MI	Participation of religious women in the creation of the nursing service in a university hospital (1909-2005)	Rev. RENE, 2014; 15(3):411-9	Qualitative social-historical To analyze the participation of religious women in the creation of the nursing service in the state of Rio Grande do Norte.	Interviews with 10 professional religious women who worked in the hospital from 1950.	Documentary	People who work in nursing are under prepared; the SantAna sisters were responsible during decades for the internal administration of the hospital, and for patient care.
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**Articles on "Spirituality in the clinical practice/Nursing care"**

Article database	Authors	Title of the article	Source and year of publication	Type of study and objective	Type of sample	Variables of the phenomenon studied	Results and statistical analysis
BDEF 1	Ferreira AGN, Gubert FA, Martins AKL, Galvão MTG, Vieira NFC, Pinheiro PNC	Health promotion in the religious scenario: opportunities for nursing care	Rev Gaúcha Enferm, 2011; 32(4):744-50.	Qualitative Describing health promotion practices developed in the religious setting	1 priest and 3 coordinators of projects linked to the Catholic Church in the state of Rio Grande do Sul	Audio of interviews recorded	Health education and promotion are present in the activities developed by the volunteers in the religious setting. More nursing professionals are needed in this scenario.
LILACS 2	Murakami R, Campos CJG	Religion and mental health: the challenge of integrating religiosity to patient care	Rev. Bras Enferm, 2012; 65(2):mar.-abr.	Review Perform an integral analysis of scientific production about religion and mental health care.	13 complete papers	Articles from 2000-2010, available, thematically compatible to the purposes of the study	Religion is a dimension that can positively contribute to the treatment of the patient with a mental disease, offering emotional and social control, as well as teaching habits that promote quality of life.
LILACS 3	Abrão FMS, Góis ARS, Souza MSB, Araujo RA, Cartaxo CMB, Oliveira DC.	Social representations of nurses about religiosity while caring for patients in the dying process	Rev. Bras. Enferm., 2013; 66(5):730-7.	Qualitative Understanding the social representations of nurses regarding religiosity when caring for patients who are going through the dying process	Bardin analysis with 20 nurses	Recorded interviews	The representations of religiosity inserted in the practice of caring for patients who are going through the dying process value the practice of the nurse, allowing for the elaboration of coping mechanisms.

LILACS 4	Soares AN, Morgan BS, Santos FBO, Matozinhos FP, Penna CMM	Everyday health-related beliefs and practices among primary health care users	Rev. Enferm. UERJ, 2014; 22(1):83-8.	Qualitative case study Understanding the cultural influences on the meanings and practices of disease-health	13 clients from the basic health network	Semi-structured interviews	Practices of care are moved by beliefs. Faith emerges as a status of the therapeutic resources. A reflection is needed for professional health practice.
LILACS 5	Castelo-Branco MZ, Brito D, Fernandes-Sousa C.	The Spiritual Needs of Hospitalized Patients: An Integrative Review	Aquichan, 2014; 14(1):100-8.	Integrative review Identifying the spiritual needs of the hospitalized person and concepts of spirituality.	10 quantitative and qualitative studies.	What are the spiritual needs of the hospitalized person, and the spirituality concepts used in the selected studies?	The following spiritual needs emerged: the search for meaning in disease and suffering; one's relationship with others and with a higher power. Concepts: meaning of life, relationships, transcendence and religious practices. Patients express their needs in subtler ways.
<b>Articles on "The Meaning of Spirituality for Nurses"</b>							
Article database	Researcher s (authors)	Title of the article	Source and year of publication	Type of study and objective	Sample type (how many, male, female)	Variables of the phenomenon studied	Results and statistical analysis
LILACS 1	Penha RM, Silva MJP	Meaning of spirituality for critical care nursing	Texto e Contexto enferm., 2012; 21(2):260-8	Qualitative Identifying the meaning of spirituality for the nursing ICU team and how that interferes in the caring process	34 professionals from the nursing team of an ICU in São Paulo	Semi-structured interviews	The multiplicity of meanings reflected the multidimensionality of concepts, related to the emotional conditions of the nursing team itself, as they interfere in the empathy relationships and in existential questions.
LILACS 2	Cortez EA	Religiosity in terms of the influence of health and spirituality: reflections for nursing care	Online Braz. J. nurs. (Online), 2012; 11(2,supl. 1);1.	Editorial	Editorial	Editorial	It is necessary to understand religious/spiritual beliefs and the different ways in which they are expressed, and the nurses should value that as they provide care.

## DISCUSSION

### Spirituality in nursing education

During discussions, reflections and actions, a deeper look on the theme of religiosity and spirituality in the training of nurses, whether in theory, in the practice of care or in academic management, is an important contribution for an integral care to be offered. However, technical and scientific care is needed in this field<sup>13</sup>.

A study with 30 nurses in a semi-intensive unit in São Paulo found that the nurses are "well" spiritually, but state they were not trained to assist the patient spiritually<sup>14</sup>.

In a research that talked about the nurse's education in a specialized area, as oncology pediatrics, the authors highlighted the importance of spiritual care for promoting health among families that have children and adolescents with cancer, suggesting that knowledge regarding spiritual assistance is an essential element for the completion of nursing education, when it comes to this type of care<sup>15</sup>.

In a "bibliographic" review which included publications from 2002 to 2012 about spirituality and nursing, 18 papers were found to indicate through evidences that spirituality was there understood as a universal concept. However, it was noted that the nurses are under-prepared regarding health practices that involve spirituality<sup>16</sup>.

When 120 students from nursing were interviewed in Rio Grande do Sul, and asked to describe their opinions regarding Religiosity/Spirituality in university education, 76% of them believed that spirituality influences health, whereas only 10% felt prepared to approach these aspects with the patient, and 54% pointed out that the university does not give support for doing so<sup>17</sup>.

The same was stated by 10 religious women who worked as nurses in a university hospital at the state of Rio Grande do Norte, and said that there was a lack of preparation of nursing professionals to assist patients' spirituality<sup>18</sup>.

### Spirituality in clinical practice/Nursing care

In this category, it is important to mention a qualitative study led by a priest and three project coordinators linked to the Catholic Church, which showed that education and health promotion are present in the actions developed by volunteers in the religious setting. The researchers, however, highlighted the need for more nursing professionals willing to act in the communities of faith<sup>19</sup>.

In an integrative literature review that researched articles from 2000 to 2010 with the theme "spirituality and mental health", the authors stated that religion is a dimension that can contribute positively to the treatment of patients with mental illnesses, as it provides emotional and social control, as well as the teaching of habits that promote quality of life<sup>20</sup>.

In a research involving 20 ICU nurses in Recife, whose objective was to understand their social representations regarding religiosity as they cared for patients who were going through the dying process, religiosity in the practice of caring for "terminal" patients was found to contribute and value the practice of the nurse, letting them elaborate coping mechanisms<sup>21</sup>.

Another study with 13 clients from the primary health network has shown that health care practices are moved by beliefs. Faith emerges as a "status" of the therapeutic resource, though a deeper reflection becomes necessary to improve professional practices in this field of health<sup>22</sup>.

Another highlight was an integrative review of literature whose objective was identifying the spiritual needs of the hospitalized person, from which emerged: the search for meaning in disease and suffering; the relationship between oneself and a higher power. The study has shown that the patients demonstrated their spiritual needs in very subtle ways, requiring the professionals to offer a special type of attention to address them<sup>23</sup>.

### The meaning of spirituality for nurses

In a study about what spirituality means for the intensive care nurses, 34 nurses from an ICU in a São Paulo University Hospital stated that the



multiplicity of meanings reflected itself into a conceptual multidimensionality, that by its turn is related to the emotional conditions of the nursing team itself. These meanings can interfere in the empathy relationships and in existential issues<sup>24</sup>.

It is necessary to understand religious/spiritual beliefs and the different ways in which they are expressed, and the nurses should value that as they provide care<sup>25</sup>.

In most conclusions of these studies, it became clear that nursing is not a purely technical profession. Technique mechanizes activities; and the role of the nurse involves human activities that respect the individuality of the being, and for that, must include spiritual questions in its practice.

To the nurse, living spirituality to the fullest includes the manifestation of the sacred in daily actions, the exercise of faith, hope, courage, altruism, solidarity, empathy, love, and the acceptance of life's finiteness as an experience which allows one to be sensible to others, and to find a meaning for their own existences.

## CONCLUSION

The integrative review was an adequate method to understand the relationship among religion, spirituality and nursing in Brazil. It allowed for an update regarding the last publications on the approach, both in the educational field and in the clinical practice of patient care, as well as its use as an important strategy to cope with illnesses.

The authors included in this review recognize the importance of the theme "spirituality and nursing in the education and in the clinical field", however, literature points out that nurses do not feel prepared to assist patients in spiritual matters. From that, the need for investment in the formation of these professionals, regarding these aspects, becomes clear, since they spend 24 hours a day with their patients and the ability and knowledge to conduct adequate interventions is required from them, as nurses are human beings who

take care of others, professionals of the integral and humane care.

It is necessary to conduct more researches of the evidence levels "1" (results of meta-analysis and multiple controlled and randomized clinical studies), "2" (evidences obtained through individual studies with experimental design) and "3" (evidences of semi-experimental studies), in order to help decision making in the field of spirituality in nursing, both in the formation and in the clinical practice, including theory/methodology concepts.

Finally, this review on the field of religion, spirituality and nursing is expected to contribute to the reduction of the distance between practice and the actions that propose integral care, helping nurses to meet the spiritual needs of their clients, treating them as an essential aspect of health promotion.

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#### CONTRIBUTIONS

**Gina Andrade Abdala** participated in the study conception, data collection and analysis. **Maria Dyrce Dias Meira** conducted the critical review of the text and methodology. **Sara Lidiane Santos da Silva Oliveira** took part on the literature review and the formatting of the article. **Daniela da Cunha dos Santos** wrote the abstract, resúmen and resumo, and conducted a final revision.

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