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FORENSIC NURSING IN UNDERGRADUATE COURSES: FOCUS ON THE HEALTH OF CHILDREN, WOMEN AND THE ELDERLY

*Enfermagem forense em cursos de graduação: foco na saúde de crianças, mulheres e idosos**Enfermería forense en la carrera de pregrado: enfoque en la salud del niño, la mujer y el anciano***Jhuliano Silva Ramos de Souza**¹ **Zélia Marilda Rodrigues Resck**¹ **Sueli de Carvalho Vilela**¹ 

RESUMO

OBJETIVO: identificar a Enfermagem Forense em cursos de graduação nas áreas de saúde da criança, saúde da mulher e saúde do idoso. **Método:** estudo quantitativo, descritivo e exploratório com coordenadores dos cursos de enfermagem de 88 Instituições de Ensino Superior. Para análise dos dados, utilizou a estatística descritiva e inferencial e o Teste Exato de Fisher. **Resultados:** os resultados mostraram que a maioria das instituições participantes foram privadas, localizadas no Sudeste e oferecem disciplinas que abordaram conteúdos sobre violência física, violência sexual, violência psicológica, violência doméstica/familiar, bullying, maus-tratos, aborto, atendimento de vítimas de violência sexual aos serviços especializados e coleta de vestígios forenses em vítimas de violência sexual, nas disciplinas de saúde da criança, saúde da mulher e saúde do idoso. **Conclusão:** a presença desses conteúdos nas disciplinas é fundamental para capacitar alunos e professores a lidar com casos de violência de forma mais eficaz.

DESCRITORES: Enfermagem forense; Saúde da criança; Saúde da mulher; Saúde do idoso; Universidades.

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ABSTRACT

OBJECTIVE: to identify Forensic Nursing in undergraduate courses in the areas of children's health, women's health and elderly health. **Method:** quantitative, descriptive and exploratory study with nursing course coordinators from 88 Higher Education Institutions. To analyze the data, descriptive and inferential statistics and Fisher's Exact Test were used. **Results:** the results showed that the majority of participating institutions were private, located in the Southeast and offer subjects that addressed content on physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, domestic/family violence, bullying, mistreatment, abortion, care for victims of sexual violence to specialized services and collecting forensic traces from victims of sexual violence, in the disciplines of child health, women's health and elderly health. **Conclusion:** the presence of this content in the subjects is essential to enable students and teachers to deal with cases of violence more effectively.

DESCRIPTORS: Forensic nursing. Child health; Women's health; Health of the elderly; Universities.

RESUMEN

OBJETIVO: identificar la Enfermería Forense en cursos de pregrado en las áreas de salud del niño, salud de la mujer y salud del anciano. **Método:** estudio cuantitativo, descriptivo y exploratorio con coordinadores de cursos de enfermería de 88 Instituciones de Educación Superior. Para analizar los datos se utilizó estadística descriptiva e inferencial y la Prueba Exacta de Fisher. Resultados: los resultados mostraron que la mayoría de las instituciones participantes eran privadas, ubicadas en el Sudeste y ofrecen temáticas que abordaban contenidos sobre violencia física, violencia sexual, violencia psicológica, violencia doméstica/familiar, bullying, maltrato, aborto, atención a víctimas de violencia sexual, violencia a servicios especializados y la recopilación de rastros forenses de víctimas de violencia sexual, en las disciplinas de la salud infantil, la salud de la mujer y la salud de las personas mayores. **Conclusión:** la presencia de este contenido en las asignaturas es fundamental para que estudiantes y profesores puedan abordar con mayor eficacia los casos de violencia.

DESCRIPTORES: Enfermería forense; Salud infantil; Salud de la mujer; Salud del anciano; Universidades.

INTRODUCTION

The Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education promoted changes in the curricular models of undergraduate courses in 1990, granting more autonomy to Higher Education Institutions in defining their pedagogical, political and social approaches, especially with regard to professional training.¹ Five years later, the Curricular Guidelines for Nursing Courses (DCN/ENF) were established, outlining the profile of the generalist nurse, competencies, skills and specific subjects included in the Pedagogical Projects of the Courses in the institutions that offer this training.²

Forensic Nursing is a specialty recognized in Brazil by Resolution No. 389 of 2011 and updated by Resolution No. 581 of 2018 by the Federal Nursing Council (COFEN).^{3,4} Nurses specializing in this field work in the prevention, assistance, promotion and recovery of people involved in cases of violence, including victims, aggressors and family members.⁵

Violence is recognized as a serious risk to the population and a global public health problem, and can take various forms, such as physical, psychological, moral and sexual.^{6,7} People in situations of violence can include children, adolescents, women and the elderly, and it is the role of nursing professionals to notify and report them to the local authorities.⁸⁻¹⁰

The specialty works in various settings of violence, such as the prison system, Medical-Legal Institutes (IMLs), trauma services and mass disasters, with the aim of providing care to victims and those responsible for violence.⁸ Including subjects and content on Forensic Nursing in undergraduate education enables them to learn about this specialty and its practical application in caring for people in situations of violence, helping to fill theoretical and practical gaps.^{11,12}

The experience of the teacher and student can be used as a tool for reflection, to promote a critical look at the subject, integrating it into various subjects in the curriculum, whether in the areas of child health, women's health or elderly health, for example.¹²⁻¹⁴ The authors mentioned also reinforce the need to awaken the interest of teachers in integrating these topics into the undergraduate curriculum, in order to prepare students to deal with situations of violence in professional practice. It is essential that future nurses acquire this knowledge, especially if they wish to pursue a career in forensics or encounter cases of violence, in order to provide quality care.

Therefore, this study aims to identify forensic nursing in the areas of child health, women's health and elderly health in undergraduate courses.

METHOD

This study is characterized as quantitative, descriptive and exploratory. The sample consisted of 88 public and private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), with the participation of the coordinators of undergraduate nursing courses, using an instrument developed and validated by the researchers themselves.

A survey of public and private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) was carried out using the Ministry of Education's interactive system (e-MEC) in March 2018.¹⁵ A total of 1,036 institutions were found, of which 248 nursing courses were inactive due to various reasons, such as deactivation, failure to start, lack of information in the MEC system and lack of class formation. These courses were excluded from the analysis. On the other hand, active institutions duly registered with the MEC were identified and included in the study.

Nursing course coordinators were contacted and invited to take part in the study, receiving the "Questionnaire for Tracking Forensic Nursing Subjects and Content in Undergraduate Nursing Courses" and the Informed Consent Form (ICF) via the Google Forms platform. A deadline of five months was set for them to return the completed instrument. Of those contacted, 904 did not return the questionnaire and five refused to take part.

After receiving the completed data, a database was created in Microsoft Office Excel, version 2016, which was then transferred to the Software Package for the Social Science (SPSS), version 20.0, for descriptive and inferential statistical analysis.

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Alfenas, with Opinion: 2.893.206; CAAE: 97046718.0.0000.5142. All participants received an electronic informed consent form in the Google Forms questionnaire, following the ethical principles related to research involving human beings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Of the 1,036 courses registered with the Ministry of Education¹⁵ and included in the study, 88 (100%) Brazilian undergraduate nursing courses were analyzed. Of these, 68 (77.3%) are from private universities/faculties; 34 (38.6%) are located in the Southeast; 88 (100%) are face-to-face; 61 (69.3%) last 10 semesters; and 52 (45.6%) are offered at night. The growth of private institutions in Brazil since the 1990s is evident,¹⁶ with a possible concentration in the Southeast region due to its economic development.¹⁷ In 2017, the MEC

website listed 984 face-to-face nursing courses, 90% of which were offered by private universities.¹⁸

The emphasis on Forensic Nursing content was mainly directed towards Women's Health subjects in 55 (62.5%) institutions, Child and Adolescent Health in 22 (25.0%) institutions, and Elderly Health in 12 (13.6%) universities. For this study, we chose to highlight the three main areas of incidence of violence in the Brazilian population.^{6,7}

In the subjects of Child and Adolescent Health at 22 (25.0%) HEIs, the topics covered include sexual violence at 22 (25.0%) HEIs, physical violence at 14 (15.9%) HEIs, bullying at 13 (14.77%) HEIs, and psychological violence at 11 (12.5%) HEIs. These data suggest a possible increase in violence against children and adolescents, a reality that is unfortunately not uncommon in Brazil, where this population is exposed and vulnerable, suffering rights violations and being among the country's homicide victims.^{6,7}

The role of nurses in cases of violence against children and adolescents includes dialog with the person accompanying them, separating them from the victim, registering the case and notifying the Guardianship Council. However, the lack of standardization in the interventions of professionals shows the need for training and the implementation of institutional protocols to deal with this challenge.¹⁹ It is essential to include the subject of violence in the undergraduate courses of nursing professionals, as well as offering specific training for reporting, following the guidelines of the Statute of the Child and Adolescent.²⁰

Forensic nursing plays a crucial role in the health of children and adolescents, carrying out detailed examinations to collect evidence, identify and treat injuries and traumas resulting from physical, emotional, sexual abuse or death. It also offers emotional support to both victims and their families. The practice involves examining, recognizing, collecting and preserving relevant evidence. Violence against children and adolescents is a public health problem and the responsibility for producing evidence falls on the victim, which can cause even more trauma for these individuals.²¹

In the Women's Health disciplines at 55 (62.5%) HEIs, the content covers topics such as abortion at 59 (67.0%) HEIs, the care of patients who are victims of sexual violence in specialized services at 33 (37.5%) HEIs, physical violence at 32 (36.3%) HEIs, sexual violence at 31 (35.22%) HEIs, domestic/family violence at 19 (21.5%) HEIs, and the collection of forensic evidence from victims of sexual violence at 14 (15.9%) HEIs. Women victims face different forms of violence, including sexual, physical, psychological and others.^{6,7} A study of hospital nurses²² identified gaps in knowledge about caring for women

victims of domestic violence. Another study highlights the importance of implementing protocols for the care of victims of violence in undergraduate nursing courses.²³

Forensic nursing in women's health is essential for caring for, promoting health and protecting victims of violence. The inclusion of this topic in the training of nurses benefits learning, developing skills and competencies for assisting victims of violence in its various forms, such as physical, domestic, sexual, psychological and moral.²⁵

In the area of Elderly Health in 12 (13.6%) HEIs, the content addresses issues of mistreatment in 20 (22.7%) HEIs, psychological violence in 11 (12.5%) HEIs, and domestic/family violence in 10 (11.3%) HEIs. Studies indicate that the highest incidence of violence against the elderly occurs precisely in these areas, often perpetrated by individuals within their family circle.^{25,26}

In Forensic Nursing related to the health of the elderly, general nurses provide forensic care, even without having specific knowledge of the specialty. They support elderly victims of violence, investigate cases through clinical assessment, report them to the authorities and involve the multi-professional team to solve the problem. However, these professionals face difficulties in identifying and dealing with elderly people in situations of violence, due to the complexity and difficulty of detecting this phenomenon. Some of the barriers include a lack of ability to recognize situations of violence and the absence of adequate training.²⁷

Therefore, investing in preventive measures in health services to combat violence against children, adolescents, women and the elderly is fundamental so that the results and discussions are based on solid evidence, which contributes significantly to the advancement of knowledge on the subject.²³ This knowledge is crucial for future nursing professionals who often encounter situations of violence in the field of professional internship, highlighting the need to train teachers in the field of forensic sciences as a bridge between health and education.

CONCLUSION

The identification of Forensic Nursing in the subjects of Child Health, Women's Health and Elderly Health in undergraduate courses covers topics such as physical, psychological, sexual, domestic/family violence, abortion, bullying, mistreatment and referral to specialized services. It is noteworthy that none of the areas mentioned have addressed the issue of perpetrators, the family and the care needed for collection and legal procedures arising from situations of violence.

One of the study's main contributions is to highlight the need to ensure that the violence-related content taught at HEIs is applied in students' professional practice, in order to familiarize them effectively with the issue.

One limitation identified was the lack of a specific approach to Forensic Nursing in nursing courses. It is recommended that future studies include this specialty in their courses. It was also difficult to include studies in this area in HEIs, due to the resistance of coordinators to take part in the research.

It is important to address this issue in order to encourage coordinators to reflect on the inclusion of the subject in their curricula. It is essential to carry out further research into the development of a curricular model related to the subject of Forensic Nursing, as well as identifying the content covered in which these themes stand out, in order to assess how the teaching material is presented to students.

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