

The Nursing Students' Viewpoint Regarding the Papanicolaou Test for Gynecological Diseases Diagnosis

Percepção dos Estudantes de Enfermagem Sobre o Exame Papanicolaou para Diagnóstico das Doenças Ginecológicas

La Percepción de los Estudiantes de Enfermería Sobre el Examen Papanicolaou para Diagnóstico de las Enfermedad Ginecológicas

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The study's purpose has been to present the nursing students' perception with regards to the Papanicolaou test (Pap smear, also called Pap test) for gynecological diseases diagnosis. **Methods:** It is a descriptive-exploratory study with both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The research was carried out in the Nursing Graduation Course from the Higher Education Institution named *Faculdades Integradas de Patos*. The sample consisted of 100 nursing students who accepted to participate. **Results:** The results have shown that all students were aware about the efficacy of the exam, and only 32% did not have the opportunity to do such procedure during the internships. Furthermore, it was noted that students have a positive perception about the Pap smear and the necessary guidelines for promoting women's health. **Conclusion:** It was possible to underline the importance of both theoretical and practical knowledge of students and future nursing professionals, concerning the exam conduct and also the guidelines to be passed on to the users who will perform the Pap smear.

Descriptors: Students, Cervical neoplasms, Papanicolaou test.

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RESUMO

Objetivo: Desvelar a percepção dos estudantes de enfermagem sobre o exame Papanicolaou no diagnóstico das doenças ginecológicas. **Métodos:** descritivo e exploratório, com abordagem quali-quantitativa. A pesquisa foi realizada nas Faculdades Integradas de Patos no curso de enfermagem. A amostra composta por 100 estudantes de enfermagem que aceitaram participar da pesquisa. **Resultados:** Todos os estudantes sabem da eficácia do exame, porém nem todos tiveram a oportunidade de realizar o mesmo durante os estágios, além disso, nota-se que os estudantes sabem a importância do exame Papanicolaou e as orientações necessárias para a saúde da mulher. **Conclusão:** Evidenciou-se a importância do conhecimento teórico e prático dos estudantes e futuros profissionais da enfermagem, sobre a conduta do exame e orientações a serem repassadas para as usuárias que venham a realizar o papanicolaou.

Descritores: Estudantes, Neoplasias do Colo do Útero, Teste de Papanicolaou.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Desvelar la percepción de los estudiantes de enfermería sobre el examen Papanicolaou en el diagnóstico de las enfermedades ginecológicas. **Métodos:** descriptivo y exploratorio, con abordaje cuali-cuantitativo. La investigación fue realizada en las Faculdades Integradas de Patos en el curso de enfermería. La muestra fue compuesta por 100 estudiantes de enfermería que aceptaron participar en la investigación. **Resultados:** Todos los estudiantes saben de la eficacia del examen, pero no todos tuvieron la oportunidad de realizar lo mismo durante las prácticas, además, se nota que los estudiantes saben de la importancia del examen Papanicolaou y las orientaciones necesarias para la salud de la mujer. **Conclusión:** Se evidenció la importancia del conocimiento teórico y práctico de los estudiantes y futuros profesionales de enfermería, sobre la conducta del examen y orientaciones que van ser repassadas para las usuarias que vengam a realizar el papanicolaou. **Descriptor:** Estudiantes, Neoplasias del cuello del útero, Prueba de Papanicolaou.

INTRODUCTION

Oncotic cytology is a microscopic analysis of cell characteristics, commonly used in the detection of tumor lesions. The preventive exam of cervix popularly known as Papanicolaou, technically called of colpocytology, is one of the exams in which this methodology is often applied. This analysis is incorporated into the entire gynecological examination, which covers the prevention and promotion of the health of the women who carry out these consultations.¹

It is of great importance the nursing responsibility to incorporate guidelines on the role of preventive examination in the attention to women, in a fundamental way to encourage its accomplishment, contributing to reduce the incidence and mortality of cervical cancer in this population, which often see the practice of this examination as unnecessary.¹

The health services have the obligation to offer cytopathology in the basic units. Furthermore, it is also necessary to encourage women in their accomplishment, and the multidisciplinary team can perform a comprehensive care to cover all women's needs. Regarding the strategies used in prevention programs, these are mainly failures, in the lack of information, culminating with late diagnoses

and increased mortality.²

Performing the Papanicolaou test (Pap smear, also called Pap test), besides being important for a pre-established clinical examination linked to the norms and routines of the health unit, also serves as a form of welcome, dialogue, reflection and empowerment of the woman who seeks the service to understand the control over the determinants of their health, strengthening autonomy over their lives and seeking to establish healthy habits with the level of high information, conducted by the nursing professionals.³

During the Nursing Graduation Course, nursing undergraduate students have theoretical and practical experiences in the area of women's health, so the students' perceptions about the Pap smear become relevant to the functionality of this exam. The students' knowledge about the cytological examination and how effective it is in the early diagnosis of vulvovaginitis is held of primary importance.

Considering the available literature on this topic, the following question was raised: What is the nursing students' viewpoint regarding the Pap smear for gynecological diseases diagnosis? Therefore, this study aims to show the perception of nursing students about the Pap smear for gynecological diseases diagnosis, and also to show the difficulties faced by nursing students with regards to the Pap smear.

METHODS

It is a descriptive-exploratory study with both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Exploratory research has as main purpose to develop, clarify and modify concepts and ideas, in order to formulate more precise problems or searchable hypotheses for later studies.⁴ The research was carried out in the Nursing Graduation Course from the Higher Education Institution named *Faculdades Integradas de Patos*, located in *Patos* city, State of *Paraíba*.

The population was composed of all the nursing students who study the 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th semesters in the Institution mentioned above, the population being 170 students and the sample composed of 100 nursing students who accept to participate in the research according to the following inclusion criteria: Being a nursing undergraduate student and having studied the discipline of women's health. Those students who were not present at the interview were excluded.

The participants were informed about the purpose of the study, as well as the confidentiality of the information provided during the interview. After receiving all the information about the objectives of the research, the same ones to participate in the study, signed the Free and Informed Consent Term.

The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire previously prepared by the authors, containing objective questions and a subjective question, the same is composed of socioeconomic and demographic

data, in the first part, and the second the data referring to the objective of the study.

Data collection was performed over the time period from September to October 2017. After the data collection stage, the data were submitted to simple statistical analysis with the help of the Excel Office 2010 program, which were analyzed statistically in the period described above and based on the literature qualitative data through qualitative variables through the Collective Subject Discourse.⁶

The research project was sent to the Research Ethics Committee from the Faculdades Integradas de Patos, approved by the *Certificado de Apresentação para Apreciação Ética (CAAE)* [Certificate of Presentation for Ethical Appreciation] No. 69589817.0.0000.5181 and Legal Opinion No. 2.252.213. The research was carried out with the authorization of the Secretary General of the Institution, taking into consideration the ethical aspects in research involving human beings, according to the Resolution No. 466/2012 from the National Health Council, which regulates research involving human beings.⁷

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 – Sample characterization regarding the socio-demographic data (n=100). Patos city, State of Paraíba, 2017.

Variable	n (%)
Age group	
from 20 to 24 years old	50 (50)
from 25 to 30 years old	32 (32)
30 years old or more	18 (18)
Marital status	
Single	78 (78)
Married	20 (20)
Divorced	2 (2)
Gender	
Female	86 (86)
Male	14 (14)
Semester in college	
7 th semester	15 (15)
8 th semester	29 (29)
9 th semester	26 (26)
10 th semester	30 (30)

Research data.

Table 1 reports the demographic data of the study, and according to the age group the largest population is between 20 and 24 years old (50%). In the variable marital status, it is observed that 78% are single, 20 (20%) are married and 2 (2%) are divorced. Concerning the gender, 86 (86%) are female and 14 (14%) are male. Considering the semester in college, 30 (30%) corresponds to the 10th semester, 29 (29%) to the 8th semester, 26 (26%) to the 9th semester, and 15 (15%) to the 7th semester.

Table 2 - Sample characterization regarding the Pap smear efficiency (n=100). Patos city, State of Paraíba, 2017.

Variable	n (%)
Efficiency	
YES	100 (100)
It is effective in the early detection of cervical cancer and to diagnose vulvovaginitis.	
NO	0 (0)

Research data.

Table 2 shows the Pap smear efficiency, where 100 (100%) students of the study answered yes, identifying all who were interviewed affirm that the exam is efficient both in the early detection of cervical cancer, as well as in the diagnosis of vulvovaginitis.

Table 3 - Sample characterization regarding to risk factors for the development of cervical cancer (n=100). Patos city, State of Paraíba, 2017.

Variable*	n (%)
Multiplicity of sexual partners	29 (29)
Human Papillomavirus (HPV) infection	89 (89)
Early onset of sexual activity	14 (14)
Prolonged use of oral contraceptives	6 (6)
Record of sexually transmitted infections	20 (20)
All	3 (3)

Research data.

*Students could pick more than one variable.

Table 3 shows the results about the risk factors for the development of cervical cancer and 89 (89%) responded to Human Papillomavirus (HPV) infection, 29 (29%) multiplicity of partners, 20 (20%), record of sexually transmitted infections, 14 (14%) early onset of sexual activity, 6 (6%) prolonged use of oral contraceptives, and 3 (3%) stated that all alternatives are risk factors. It must be emphasized that for this question of the questionnaire, the interviewee could choose more than one alternative.

Table 4 - Sample characterization regarding the safety in performing the Pap smear in women (n=100). Patos city, State of Paraíba, 2017.

Variable	n (%)
YES:	85 (85)
1- Having theoretical and practical knowledge for the performance.	
2- Having autonomy and knowledge.	
NO:	15 (15)
1- Due to lack of experience by taking into consideration the importance of the exam.	
2- Not having practical skills.	

Research data.

According to **Table 4**, the interviewees were questioned about the safety in performing the Pap smear in women. 85 (85%) answered that yes, with some reports as: theoretical and practical knowledge for the realization, have autonomy and knowledge. And the other 15 (15%) did not, declaring that they did not have security in performing the test, with some reports also: due to lack of experience regarding the importance of the exam, and I do not have much practice. The theoretical knowledge conducts the correct way and firm security for the accomplishment of this examination, and the practice supports and improves who will do it.

Table 5 - Sample characterization regarding the accomplishment of the cytopathological examination during the discipline of women's health (n=100). Patos city, State of Paraíba, 2017.

Variable	n (%)
YES	68 (68)
NO	32 (32)
Due to the lack of patient demand	

Research data.

Table 5 describes the number of students who did and those who did not perform the cytopathological exam during the stage of the women's health discipline. It is possible to observe that 68 (68%) stated that they had the opportunity to perform the cytopathological examination and 32 (32%) did not, and these 32% justified that they did not perform due to lack of patients during the internship days.

Chart 1 - Guidelines for the cytopathological examination (n=100). Patos city, State of Paraíba, 2017.

Central ideas	Student reports
Exam explanation	<p>At the start of the examination, the guidelines on the procedure would be given, and by the end, discuss what was observed at the time of the examination.</p> <p>He/she would explain the importance of the exam, among others. He/she would speak of the care she should have and that it should be done yearly.</p> <p>Explain the procedure that despite being invasive, it is important.</p> <p>"Although it is an intimate consultation, shyness should be forgotten, thanks to the benefits that can be brought about in its realization. Information about the importance of the examination and guidelines about self-care.</p>
Showing the importance of vulvovaginitis detection	<p>That the Pap smear is important to identify vulvovaginitis and precursor lesions of uterine cervix cancer and when detected early, treatment becomes effective.</p>
Recommendations for taking the exam	<p>Not having sexual intercourse 48 hours prior to the exam, and avoid using ointments or other products before the examination.</p>

Research data.

Chart 1 shows three central ideas: the explanation of the pap smear, the importance of detecting vulvovaginitis, and the guidelines for conducting the exam, according to the

students' discourse on their knowledge of the guidelines that should be a consultation for the Papanicolaou test.

In a study carried out at a University of the interior of the *São Paulo* State, 23 (60%) of the interviewed students were identified as being within the age group from 17 to 22 years old, differing from the results of this study. However, the results related to the marital status corroborate with this study since the result of the research in *São Paulo* was 32 (84%) single.⁸

In another study, a larger sample of female students was identified, corresponding to 58 (81.6%) where it is perceived that this result agrees with those of this research.⁹ The female gender prevails reproducing the historical characteristic of nursing, as a profession practiced almost exclusively by women, since a long time, even though the male population has already increased in the entrance of nursing courses.¹⁰

The Pap smear is an effective way to control and interrupt the neoplastic development and malignancy of cervical cancer.¹¹ The main strategy used for the early detection of cervical cancer in Brazil is through a Pap smear. This is considered efficient for detecting not only this neoplasm, as well as vulvovaginitis, coagulated together with other health education conduits, to be carried out in the family health strategy, with the intention of obtaining prevention and health promotion of the women.¹²

It is understood that the majority of the population that was interviewed understands that the main risk factor for the development of cervical cancer is Human Papillomavirus (HPV) infection, and the other factors are also contributors.

Given these results, it was noticed that it is necessary to know the process by which the students pass to construct their reflections. It is necessary for the student to be accepted within his limitations and to guarantee the development of his professional maturity.¹³ This may help the trainee supervisors and the students themselves who are still resistant and fearful, critical-reflexive, mainly in theoretical-practical disciplines.

The greatest difficulty shown by the interviewees of this research is the lack of demand for the Pap smear during the internships, which prevents these students from observing and practicing the exam, leaving them more qualified for the market place. Seemingly, there is still a predominance of short-term internships in which the formation of links and commitment of students and teachers to the health services and of the workers towards training becomes unfeasible due to the short duration.¹⁴

In the gynecological consultation, it is necessary that appropriate guidance be given on the time interval between one examination for the other, inform about the care that the women who will perform must have before the pap smear examination, explain the accomplishment of this examination, from all the materials used to the conduct itself, and especially the importance of this in the lives of the users, informing what is useful, what diagnoses, and what prevents. And also clarify any doubt that these women may present during the gynecological consultation. As showed in **Chart**

1, the respondents reported what should be targeted to users who wish to have the Pap smear.

The information about the preventive examination represents an important criterion to consider in adherence to the examination since to carry out the examination it needs to be passed information and guidelines about its importance so that the women join and carry out the examination. In **Chart 1**, it is possible to see the importance of information and guidance on and how the Pap smear works.¹⁵

The nurse develops the main role in the Family Health Strategy, since it is the professional who performs a cytological collection of the cervix. Before the procedure, the nurse should guide the client, explaining how it is performed and what its purpose is, demystifying some taboos inherent to the population, such as pain during the procedure. Moreover, correcting some erroneous definitions of the exam objective.¹⁶

CONCLUSIONS

Through this study, it was possible to verify that everyone knows the efficiency of the examination in the diagnosis of cervical cancer and gynecological diseases, showing the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process. The results show the importance of knowledge of nursing students' classes for the discipline of women's health, as well as the importance of Pap smear to the professional practice of future professionals.

It is possible to realize that in this study there is still a difficulty encountered by students during the stage of the discipline of women's health, which is the lack of opportunity for this exam by some students, in addition to the safety and practice in accomplishing it.

Nevertheless, it should be it is clear to point out that most of the students had the opportunity to perform Pap tests, as well as highlighted the relevance of the same to detect cancer of uterus place, thus showing their perceptions of this exam.

Hence, knowledge of nursing students towards the Pap smear is of fundamental interest not only to the need to own understanding, but to perform a necessary and efficient work for the people who use the service when they become professionals.

Bearing in mind this research, an improvement in practical knowledge of nursing students must be advised, aiming for a better quality of professionals who are about to enter the labor market, and thus enhance the Pap smear testing.

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