

CURRICULAR ANALYSIS OF BIOETHICS TEACHING IN UNDERGRADUATE NURSING COURSES IN BRAZIL

ANÁLISE CURRICULAR DO ENSINO DA BIOÉTICA NOS CURSOS DE GRADUAÇÃO EM ENFERMAGEM NO BRASIL

ANÁLISIS CURRICULAR DE LA ENSEÑANZA DE LA BIOÉTICA EN CARRERAS DE LICENCIATURA EN ENFERMERÍA EN BRASIL

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Objective: to describe the characteristics of nursing higher education institutions and to analyze the teaching of bioethics in the curricula of undergraduate nursing courses throughout the country. **Method:** an exploratory and descriptive study of nursing curricula in higher education institutions. **Results:** between January 1st and December 31st, 2016, 936 active undergraduate on-site nursing courses were accounted for in the last Higher Education Census in the country. Of the 701 nursing higher education institutions that display the curriculum on-line, the undergraduate nursing courses offered in the Southeast (466 – 43.3%) and Northeast (242 – 22.5%) regions had the highest numbers of bioethics in the curriculum. **Conclusion:** the analysis of the teaching of bioethics in the curricula of undergraduate nursing courses throughout the country makes it possible to conclude that this knowledge can help the moral choices of those involved, contributing to the improvement of teaching processes and of health care actions.

Descriptors: Nursing Education. Curriculum. Bioethics. Ethics in Nursing. Higher Education.

Objetivo: descrever as características das instituições de ensino superior em enfermagem e analisar o ensino da bioética nos currículos de cursos de bacharelado em enfermagem do país. *Método:* estudo exploratório e descritivo dos currículos de enfermagem em instituições de ensino superior. *Resultados:* entre 1º de janeiro e 31 de dezembro de 2016, foram contabilizados, no último Censo de Educação Superior do país, 936 cursos de graduação em enfermagem em atividade, grau acadêmico bacharelado e modalidade presencial. Das 701 instituições de ensino superior em enfermagem com a grade curricular disponível eletronicamente, os cursos de ensino superior em enfermagem ofertados nas regiões Sudeste (466 – 43,3%) e Nordeste (242 – 22,5%), também foram os que mais tiveram a disciplina de bioética no currículo. *Conclusão:* a análise do ensino da bioética nos currículos de cursos de

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bacharelado em enfermagem do país permitiu concluir-se que esse conhecimento pode auxiliar as escolhas morais dos envolvidos, concorrendo para o aprimoramento dos processos de ensino e das ações de cuidado no âmbito da saúde.

Descritores: Educação em Enfermagem. Currículo. Bioética. Ética em Enfermagem. Educação Superior.

Objetivo: describir las características de las instituciones de enseñanza superior en Enfermería y analizar la enseñanza de la bioética en los planes de estudio de las carreras de licenciatura en Enfermería de todo el país. Método: estudio exploratorio y descriptivo de los planes de estudio de Enfermería de las instituciones de enseñanza superior. Resultados: entre el 1 de enero y el 31 de diciembre de 2016 se contabilizaron en el último Censo de Educación Superior 936 carreras de grado en Enfermería activas, con licenciatura académica y modalidad presencial. De las 701 instituciones de enseñanza superior con planes de estudio disponibles electrónicamente, las carreras de enseñanza superior en Enfermería ofrecidos en las regiones Sudeste (466 – 43,3%) y Nordeste (242 – 22,5%) también fueron las que incluyeron a la disciplina de la bioética en el plan de estudio. Conclusión: el análisis de la enseñanza de la bioética en los planes de estudio de las carreras de Licenciatura en Enfermería de todo el país permitió concluir que estos conocimientos pueden facilitar las elecciones morales de los involucrados, contribuyendo así a la mejora de los procesos de enseñanza y de las acciones de cuidado en el ámbito de la salud.

Descriptor: Educación en Enfermería. Plan de Estudio. Bioética. Ética en Enfermería. Educación Superior.

Introduction

Rapid social transformations lead to a culturally diverse health care environment. Therefore, it is essential to create innovative educational programs, especially for nurses⁽¹⁾. Professionalism is translated into practice through technical competence and adoption of values enabling the promotion of integrity in daily activities. Today's nurses need to conquer several fundamental elements that guide the profession⁽²⁾. In different countries, the code of ethics for nursing professionals has set the ethical standard for the profession, as well as it provided a guide for nurses to guide decision making process⁽³⁻⁴⁾.

In Brazil, in addition to the Code of Ethics for Nursing Professionals, which sets forth principles, rights, responsibilities, duties and prohibitions relevant to the ethical conduct of nursing professionals⁽⁴⁾, Resolution CNE/CES No. 3 of November 7th, 2001⁽⁵⁾, establishes national curriculum guidelines of the undergraduate nursing course, to be observed in the curricular organization of the institutions of the higher education system in the country. This Resolution states that nurses must have the following competences and general skills: health care, decision making, communication, leadership, administration and management, and continuing

education. Professionals must perform their services within the highest quality standards and the principles of ethics/bioethics, considering that the responsibility of health care does not end with the technical act, but rather with the solution of the health problem, both on an individual and collective level⁽⁵⁾.

Regulatory bodies set standards and codes of ethics for professional behavior in nursing that clearly communicate expectations of civility. As professionals, nurses are expected to engage in respectful relationships with users, other health professionals, and among themselves⁽⁶⁾.

Broad dialog on the different cultural and religious currents is essential to reach consensus and balance in decision-making involving problems of difficult moral mediation. Nurses' attitudes should be guided by a careful and prudent evaluation of what should be promoted and what seems inadvisable or intolerable to the present and future health of the population⁽⁷⁾.

From this perspective, it is important that bioethics be inserted in nursing education, both to provide an understanding of the conceptual foundations of bioethics and to promote the practice of critical reflection on patients' moral conflicts, values and preferences. This will certainly help nurses in the decision making process⁽⁸⁾.

Given the need for knowledge of guidelines in the education of nurses regarding the theme, this study aimed to describe the characteristics of nursing higher education institutions and to analyze the teaching of bioethics in the curricula of nursing undergraduate courses throughout the country.

Method

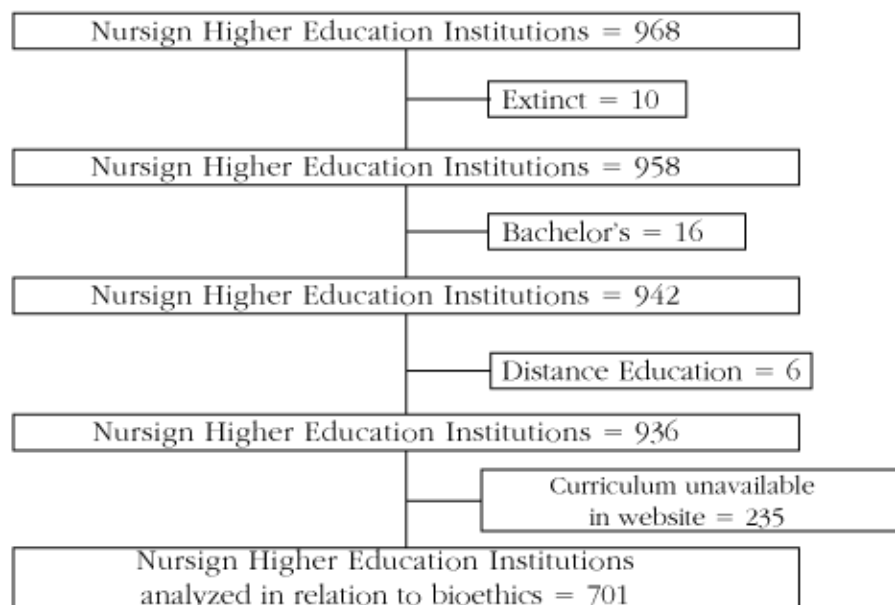
An exploratory, descriptive study of nursing curricula was conducted in higher education institutions. Access to information is available for consultation on the website of the Anísio Teixeira National Institute for Educational Studies and Research (*Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas*, INEP), through the latest Higher Education Census of 2016, released in May 2017. The inclusion criteria for the institutions and their curricula included the following: academic degree – bachelor's degree in nursing; course status – active; curricular matrix available on the institution's website;

on-site learning courses. The exclusion criteria included the following: academic degree – bachelor's degree in nursing; course status – removed; curricular matrix not available on the website and distance learning courses.

The microdata of the Higher Education Census conducted by INEP in 2016 made it possible to locate the institutions with nursing courses. Subsequently, between August and November 2017, information was collected from the nursing curricula available on the website of the higher education institutions that met the inclusion criteria.

In this way, all Brazilian higher education institutions disclosed in the 2016 Higher Education Census which offered a bachelor's degree in nursing and active on-site courses and with curricula available on the website of the higher education institutions were selected for the study. Flowchart 1 displays the numbers related to the data extracted from the INEP's Census.

Flowchart 1 – Representation of the inclusion and exclusion process of nursing schools and courses included in the study



Source: Created by the authors.

For the analysis of the higher education institutions, the following was verified: name of the higher education course (nursing), name

of the institution, Federation Unit (FU) of the course, municipality of the course, administrative category (special, private for-profit, private

non-profit, state public, federal public, and municipal public), academic organization (university center, college, federal institute of education, science and technology), academic degree (bachelor's degree), course status (active), and teaching modality (on-site or distance learning).

For the analysis of bioethics in the nursing curricula, the following information was extracted: name of the course, compulsory or optional course, semester in which the course was offered, class hours, course syllabus and programmatic content presence.

Data on nursing schools was collected in the INEP's Higher Education Census of 2016⁽⁹⁾. Nursing course data, with respect to bioethics, was collected in the curricula of the courses available on the corresponding websites of the higher education institutions.

To avoid information bias, the search was not limited to the name of the bioethics subject, but also to related subjects, whose content can be confirmed in the Pedagogical Plan of the Course (PPC), the syllabus and the programmatic content.

The study included all active higher education institutions that offered on-site nursing courses and bachelor's degree, and with the curriculum of the nursing course available on their corresponding websites.

Data was analyzed through descriptive statistics using Microsoft Excel 2013. To elaborate the spatial map of Brazil, by municipalities, the Tab for Windows – TabWin program was used.

Since this study only involved the use of secondary data, without identifying individuals or institutions, this study did not entail any risk to people, disregarding the need to comply with the guidelines and norms of Resolution No. 466/2012⁽¹⁰⁾, of the National Health Council.

Results

Between January 1st and December 31st, 2016, 34,695 higher education institutions in the country were accounted for in the last Higher Education Census. However, there were only 33,808 active courses (97.44%) registered. Among higher education active on-site courses with a bachelor's degree in the area of health, 3,734 (11.04%) institutions were registered. Of these, 936 (25.07%) offered undergraduate nursing courses.

The administrative categories of these nursing schools were the following: 414 (44.23%) private for-profit, 365 (39%) private non-profit, 75 (8.01%) federal public, 63 (6.73%) state public, 11 (1.18%) special and 8 (0.85%) municipal public. Regarding the academic organization, 474 (50.64%) were colleges; 311 (33.23%), universities; 149 (15.92%), university centers; and 2 (0.21%) belonged to a federal institute of education, science and technology.

Table 1 shows the distribution by federative unit of the 936 nursing schools. The states of São Paulo, Minas Gerais and Rio de Janeiro, in the Southeast region, had the largest proportion of municipalities with nursing higher education institutions and bachelor's degrees.

Table 1 – Distribution of the nursing higher education institutions, with a bachelor's degree, by federative units. Brazil – Jan.-Dec. 2016 (continued)

Federative Units	Nursing higher education institutions	
	n	%
North Region	77	8.23
Rondônia	16	1.71
Acre	4	0.43
Amazonas	12	1.28
Roraima	4	0.43
Pará	26	2.78
Amapá	5	0.53
Tocantins	10	1.07

Table 1 – Distribution of the nursing higher education institutions, with a bachelor's degree, by federative units. Brazil – Jan.-Dec. 2016 (conclusion)

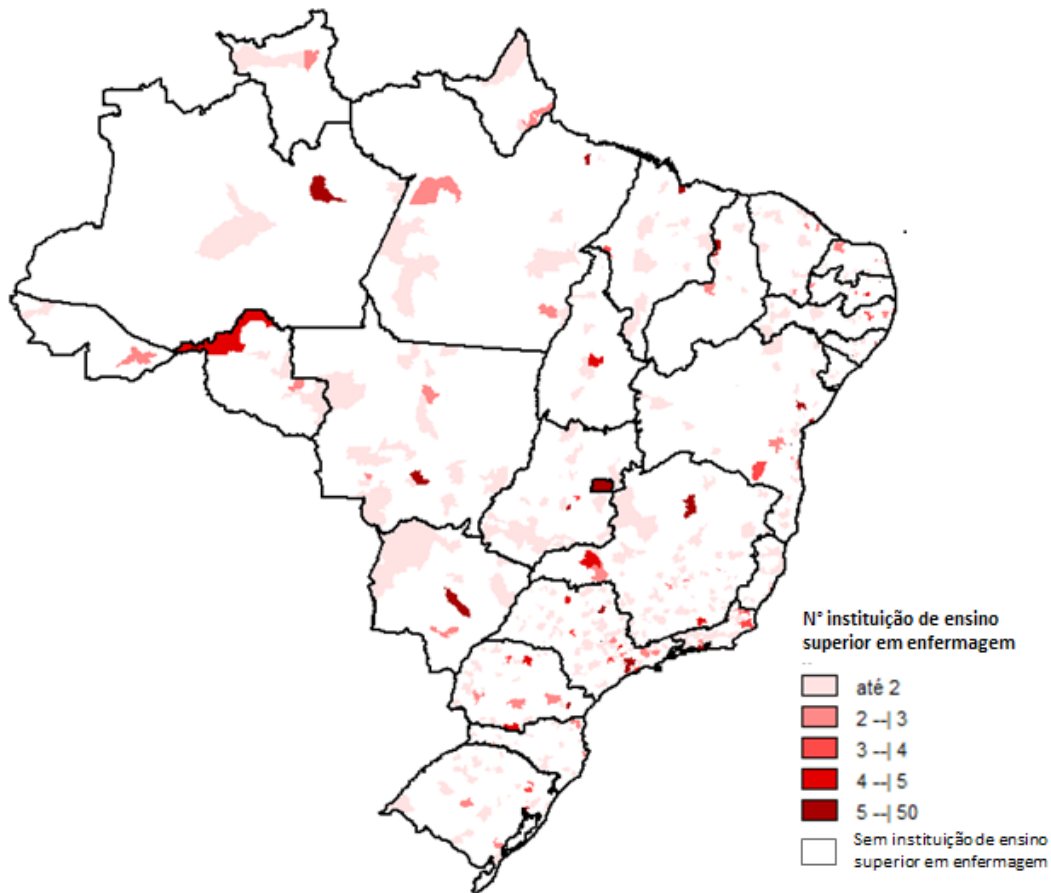
Federative Units	Nursing higher education institutions	
	n	%
Northeast Region	235	25.11
Maranhão	27	2.88
Piauí	23	2.46
Ceará	30	3.21
Rio Grande do Norte	15	1.60
Paraíba	19	2.03
Pernambuco	30	3.21
Alagoas	14	1.50
Sergipe	10	1.07
Bahia	67	7.16
Southeast Region	386	41.24
Minas Gerais	113	12.07
Espírito Santo	17	1.82
Rio de Janeiro	70	7.48
São Paulo	186	19.87
South Region	134	14.32
Paraná	55	5.88
Santa Catarina	28	2.99
Rio Grande do Sul	51	5.45
Midwest Region	104	11.11
Mato Grosso do Sul	16	1.71
Mato Grosso	27	2.88
Goiás	38	4.06
Distrito Federal	23	2.46
Brazil	936	100.00

Source: Created by the authors.

Among the 5,570 Brazilian municipalities, 420 (7.54%) offered undergraduate nursing courses with a bachelor's degree during the study period. Among the 33 cities, 50 (5.34%) institutions were registered in São Paulo, 33 (3.53%) in Rio de Janeiro, 23 (2.46%) in Brasília, 21 (2.24%) in Salvador, 19 (2.03%) in Belo Horizonte, 15 (1.6%) in Fortaleza, 14 (1.50%) in Teresina, 12 (1.28%) in Curitiba, 12 (1.28%) in Recife, 11 (1.18%) in Belém, 11 (1.18%) in Goiânia, 11 (1.18%) in Maceió, 11 (1.18%) in Porto Alegre, 10 (1.07%) in Manaus, 10 (1.07%) in São Luís, 9 (0.96%) in João Pessoa,

8 (0.85%) in Feira de Santana, 8 (0.85%) in Natal, 7 (0.75%) in Campo Grande, 7 (0.75%) in Montes Claros, 6 (0.64%) in Aracaju, 6 (0.64%) in Cuiabá, 6 (0.64%) in Ribeirão Preto, 6 (0.64%) in Vitória, 5 (0.53%) in Campina Grande, 5 (0.53%) in Campinas, 5 (0.53%) in Juiz de Fora, 5 (0.53%) in Londrina, 5 (0.53%) in Palmas, 5 (0.53%) in Porto Velho, 5 (0.53%) in Santos, 5 (0.53%) in São José do Rio Preto, and 5 (0.53%) in Uberlândia (Figure 1). Approximately 34% of the educational institutions were registered in one of the 27 state capitals.

Figure 1 – Geospatial distribution of the nursing higher education institutions with a bachelor's degree, by municipalities (N = 936). Brazil – Jan.-Dec. 2016



Source: Created by the authors.

Among the 701 nursing higher education institutions with curriculum available online, the Southeast and Northeast regions had the highest proportions: 295 (42.1%) and 166 (23.7%), respectively. Higher education courses in nursing with a bachelor's degree offered in these two regions were also the top ones to offer bioethics in the curriculum. In

all Brazilian regions, bioethics subjects were compulsory in 88% of these courses. More than 50% of the subjects were offered between the 1st and 4th period, and the class hours varied from 31 to 60 hours. The syllabus and programmatic content were not available in most nursing courses (Table 2).

Table 2 – General characteristics of the nursing courses regarding bioethics, according to the regions of the Federative Unit. Brazil – Jan.-Dec. 2016 (continued)

General characteristics	Region											
	North		Northeast		Southeast		South		Midwest		Brazil	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Institution with curriculum available online	58	8.3	166	23.7	295	42.1	108	15.4	74	10.6	701	100
Subjects on bioethics	88	8.2	242	22.5	466	43.3	157	14.6	122	11.3	1,075	100
Compulsory subject	84	95.5	215	88.8	426	91.4	148	94.3	113	92.6	986	91.7

Table 2 – General characteristics of the nursing courses regarding bioethics, according to the regions of the Federative Unit. Brazil – Jan.-Dec. 2016 (conclusion)

General characteristics	Region											
	North		Northeast		Southeast		South		Midwest		Brazil	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Semester in which courses are offered												
1 st to 4 th	53	60.2	159	65.7	206	44.2	81	51.6	70	57.4	569	52.9
5 th to 10 th	16	18.2	28	11.6	83	17.8	44	28.0	20	16.4	191	17.8
Not informed	19	21.6	55	22.7	177	38.0	32	20.4	32	26.2	315	29.3
Class hours												
≤ 30 h	16	18.2	38	15.7	93	20.0	36	22.9	28	23.0	211	19.6
31 to 60 h	59	67.0	162	66.9	256	54.9	80	51.0	74	60.7	631	58.7
31 to 90 h	3	3.4	26	10.7	67	14.4	19	12.1	14	11.5	129	12.0
> 90	5	5.7	4	1.7	4	0.9	10	6.4	2	1.6	25	2.3
Not informed	5	5.7	12	5.0	46	9.9	12	7.6	4	3.3	79	7.3
Curriculum syllabus available online	19	21.6	62	25.6	106	22.7	47	29.9	31	25.4	265	24.7
Curriculum content available online	12	13.6	30	12.4	38	8.2	11	7.0	8	6.6	99	9.2

Source: Created by the authors.

Table 3 shows the distribution of the categories identified in the nursing curricula. Among the 27 states, Rondônia, Acre, Pará, Amapá, Tocantins, Piauí, Ceará, Rio Grande do Norte, Pernambuco, São Paulo, Paraná, Rio Grande do Sul, Mato Grosso do Sul, Mato Grosso, Goiás and Distrito Federal had ratings similar to the general

data of Brazil; however, Amazonas, Roraima, Maranhão, Paraíba, Alagoas, Sergipe, Bahia, Minas Gerais, Espírito Santo, Rio de Janeiro and Santa Catarina stood out in the “Ethics, Professional Practice and Legislation” and “Ethics and Bioethics” subjects.

Table 3 – Distribution of the modalities identified in the curricula available on-line. Brazil – Jan.-Dec. 2016 (continued)

Federative Units	Ethics and Bioethics		Ethics, Professional Practice and Legislation		Bioethics and its relation to other themes		Total n
	n	%	n	%	n	%	
North Region	11	12.5	60	68.2	17	19.3	88
Rondônia	1	5.9	13	76.5	3	17.6	17
Acre	0	0.0	4	100.0	0	0.0	4
Amazonas	2	13.3	12	80.0	1	6.7	15
Roraima	2	33.3	1	16.7	3	50.0	6
Pará	4	14.8	17	63.0	6	22.2	27
Amapá	1	14.3	4	57.1	2	28.6	7
Tocantins	1	8.3	9	75.0	2	16.7	12

Table 3 – Distribution of the modalities identified in the curricula available on-line. Brazil – Jan.-Dec. 2016 (conclusion)

Federative Units	Ethics and Bioethics		Ethics, Professional Practice and Legislation		Bioethics and its relation to other themes		Total n
	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Northeast Region	49	20.2	127	52.5	66	27.3	242
Maranhão	5	22.7	13	59.1	4	18.2	22
Piauí	3	13.0	14	60.9	6	26.1	23
Ceará	3	8.1	22	59.5	12	32.4	37
Rio Grande do Norte	5	21.7	10	43.5	8	34.8	23
Paraíba	4	23.5	10	58.8	3	17.6	17
Pernambuco	3	9.7	16	51.6	12	38.7	31
Alagoas	4	30.8	6	46.2	3	23.1	13
Sergipe	4	44.4	3	33.3	2	22.2	9
Bahia	18	26.9	33	49.3	16	23.9	67
Southeast Region	103	22.1	250	53.6	113	24.2	466
Minas Gerais	30	23.8	68	54.0	28	22.2	126
Espírito Santo	8	38.1	11	52.4	2	9.5	21
Rio de Janeiro	21	27.6	35	46.1	20	26.3	76
São Paulo	44	18.1	136	56.0	63	25.9	243
South Region	37	23.6	76	48.4	44	28.0	157
Paraná	13	21.0	33	53.2	16	25.8	62
Santa Catarina	12	37.5	15	46.9	5	15.6	32
Rio Grande do Sul	12	19.0	28	44.4	23	36.5	63
Midwest Region	13	10.7	66	54.1	43	35.2	122
Mato Grosso do Sul	1	4.0	16	64.0	8	32.0	25
Mato Grosso	1	4.3	14	60.9	8	34.8	23
Goiás	6	14.3	20	47.6	16	38.1	42
Distrito Federal	5	15.6	16	50.0	11	34.4	32
Brazil	213	19.8	579	53.9	283	26.3	1,075

Source: Created by the authors.

Furthermore, in the ranking of the states with the largest number of subjects with the bioethics theme, it was found that São Paulo (243 – 22.6%), Minas Gerais (126 – 11.7%), Rio de Janeiro (76 – 7.1%), Bahia (67 – 6.2%), Rio Grande do Sul (63 – 5.9%) and Paraná (62 – 5.8%) offered the largest number of subjects.

Discussion

This study aimed to evaluate the undergraduate nursing courses with a bachelor's degree which offered the Bioethics subject, disclosed in the 2016 Higher Education Census, and made

available by MEC in May 2017. Private institutions represented over 80% of the administrative categories. Most academic organizations were represented by colleges. The Southeast and Northeast regions were, proportionally, the ones that offered the most higher education courses in nursing with a bachelor's degree. Similar results were reported between 1991 and 2012⁽¹¹⁾.

However, when analyzing a cut-out state by state, the offer of undergraduate nursing courses was higher in São Paulo, Minas Gerais, Bahia, Paraná and Rio Grande do Sul. For some authors, the political and ideological discourse,

present in normative documents that indicate higher education as a possibility of transformation of the social reality, has not been reflected in the area of nursing. Nursing courses have been expanded in a disorderly manner, concentrated in the private sector and with geographical inequality in their distribution⁽¹²⁻¹³⁾.

Most educational institutions in the study offered the bioethics subject in the first semesters of the course. The same was observed in Portugal⁽¹⁴⁾ and in other Brazilian states⁽¹⁵⁾. The inclusion of ethics, as well as bioethics, in the integrated nursing curriculum provides relevant contributions to teaching in this area of knowledge. This conclusion can be inferred from the fact that 93.75% of the courses devote at least one semester to studies with this content. This inclusion enables moments of discussion and ethical reflection throughout the curriculum creations process, enabling a new teaching model that values decision making in practical situations of nursing care⁽¹⁶⁾.

A study of three tertiary care services in Canada found that nurses reported a greater need for ethical education, additional support to deal with moral distress, conflict management with patients or family members, and resource issues⁽¹⁷⁾.

Regarding the different categories identified in the nursing curricula of Brazilian institutions with a bachelor's degree, more than 50% offered "Ethics, Professional Practice and Legislation", followed by "Bioethics and its relationship with other topics" and "Ethics and Bioethics" subjects. A study⁽¹⁸⁾ points out that the categorization of the bioethical subject has the following as main approaches: historicist – past facts and events, with research studies in Nazi concentration camps; philosophical – history of philosophy, mainly moral philosophy; and thematic – doing bioethics based on life-abortion cases or situations, euthanasia, cloning, use of human embryos in research, end-of-life treatment decisions, etc. However, studies have shown a tendency towards a bioethical approach and thematic areas related mainly to the subjects that

support nursing professionals' decision making processes⁽¹⁹⁻²⁰⁾.

A research⁽²¹⁾ that intended to gain insights from doctors and nurses concluded that human life is based on the health of human beings and of the environment in which they live, and that is why health must be effectively protected by sound actions around the world. Thus, the care to be adopted with each individual, whether in primary, secondary or tertiary care, must be agreed from both a technical and from an ethical point of view.

The increasing medicalization of health care, pressures for systematization, efficiency and cost reduction, and the aging of the population have all contributed to making the ethical practice more complex. However, to address these issues, it is important to ensure the interaction between eight levels of factors: individual factors (patients and families); individual factors (nurses); relationships among health professionals; relationships between patients and nurses; organizational health context; professional and educational regulations and standards; community; and social, political and economic⁽²²⁾.

Other studies indicate the use of computer systems in the health care sector. These consist in the use of information and communication technologies that range from health records to telemedicine and multiple forms of health education and digital tools. The purpose is to assist the decision-making processes of patients and professionals in a shared way by giving the different actors involved the necessary autonomy to make difficult decisions after receiving comprehensive information about medical facts, treatment options and care^(21,23-24).

In addition, in different health services, it is decided to discuss and resolve ethical conflicts in health ethics committees. To this end, some activities are essential, such as: educating its members, the institution's staff and also the patients on ethical issues; cooperating in the development and review of several hospital policies and guidelines to facilitate the provision of services by the staff; and providing the best

service available according to the patients' values and preferences⁽²⁵⁻²⁶⁾.

As limitations of this study, the analysis only of institutions with a curriculum available on the course website and the fact that data was not collected *in loco* in nursing higher education institutions stand out.

Conclusion

It was observed in this study that most higher education institutions in the country that offer nursing courses with a bachelor's degree are located in the Southeast Region. The North Region has the least concentration of nursing courses. The most frequent administrative category was the private for-profit category. Among the nursing higher education institutions with a bachelor's degree and curriculum available electronically, those in the Southeast and Northeast regions were those that presented, in proportion, the largest records of the bioethics subject in their curricula. For the institutions offering subjects on the bioethics theme, the compulsory characteristic was observed in most of the courses. The distributions of the modalities identified in the nursing curricula were for the "Ethics, Professional Practice and Legislation", "Bioethics and its relation to other themes" and "Ethics and Bioethics" subjects.

The analysis of the teaching of bioethics in the curricula of undergraduate nursing courses throughout the country makes it possible to conclude that this knowledge can help the moral choices of those involved, contributing to the improvement of teaching processes and of health care actions.

It was evident that the knowledge about the availability of undergraduate nursing courses with a bachelor's degree, in different regions of the country, and the survey of the profile of nursing courses regarding the provision of bioethics subject in the curriculum are essential for nurses to make right decisions.

Collaborations:

1. conception, design, analysis and interpretation of data: Flávia Caselli Pacheco, Beatriz Regina Lima de Aguiar, Mayssa Conceição Araújo, Clara Abreu Ramos, Fayda da Cruz Protasio and Dirce Bellezi Guilhem;

2. writing of the article and relevant critical review of the intellectual content: Flávia Caselli Pacheco and Dirce Bellezi Guilhem;

3. final approval of the version to be published: Dirce Bellezi Guilhem.

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