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## TEACHING PSYCHIATRIC AND MENTAL HEALTH NURSING IN BRAZIL: CURRICULAR ANALYSIS OF THE UNDERGRADUATION COURSE

Divane de Vargas<sup>1</sup>, Marjorie Ester Dias Maciel<sup>2</sup>, Marina Nolli Bittencourt<sup>3</sup>, Juliana Sabino Lenate<sup>4</sup>,  
Caroline Figueira Pereira<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ph.D. in Psychiatric Nursing. Professor, Department of Maternal-Child Nursing and Psychiatry, *Escola de Enfermagem, Universidade de São Paulo* (EE-USP). São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil. E-mail: [vargas@usp.br](mailto:vargas@usp.br)

<sup>2</sup> Doctoral student, Post-Graduate Program, EE-USP. São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil. E-mail: [marjorieester@usp.br](mailto:marjorieester@usp.br)

<sup>3</sup> Doctoral student, Post-Graduate Program, EE-USP. São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil. E-mail: [marinanolli@usp.br](mailto:marinanolli@usp.br)

<sup>4</sup> Doctoral student, Post-Graduate Program, EE-USP. São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil. E-mail: [ju.s.lenate@gmail.com](mailto:ju.s.lenate@gmail.com)

<sup>5</sup> Doctoral student, Post-Graduate Program, EE-USP. São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil. E-mail: [caroline.figueira.pereira@ee.usp.br](mailto:caroline.figueira.pereira@ee.usp.br)

### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** to analyze the Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing discipline in the curricular structure of Brazilian undergraduate nursing programs.

**Method:** an exploratory study with documentary analysis with data collected from the websites of institutions registered on the National Institute for Educational Studies and Research "Anísio Teixeira" website, via an instrument prepared for this study with information related to the institution, the disciplines offered in the area, the location of course(s) in the curriculum and workload. The data obtained were transferred to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 2.0 for performing descriptive statistics.

**Results:** 88.8% of the 738 registered courses are offered by private institutions, 72% of the institutions surveyed made the curriculums of the courses available *on-line*, and among these 47.2% had at least one discipline in the area, with a mean of 96 hours among private institutions and 142 hours in public ones, accounting for 2.4% and 3.5% of the total course workload, respectively.

**Conclusion:** there is a predominance of private institutions offering undergraduate nursing programs, and some of these programs do not offer any disciplines related to Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing. It was also noticed that there was no standardization regarding the nomenclature and the period for offering this discipline. We suggest further studies regarding how the theoretical and practical contents of this discipline are taught.

**DESCRIPTORS:** Nursing education. Mental health. Teaching. Education. Curriculum.

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## O ENSINO DE ENFERMAGEM PSIQUIÁTRICA E SAÚDE MENTAL NO BRASIL: ANÁLISE CURRICULAR DA GRADUAÇÃO

### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** analisar as disciplinas de Enfermagem Psiquiátrica e Saúde Mental nas estruturas curriculares dos cursos de graduação em enfermagem brasileiros.

**Método:** estudo exploratório de análise documental, cujos dados foram coletados nos *websites* das instituições que possuíam cadastro no site do Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, através de instrumento elaborado para esse estudo, com informações relacionadas à instituição, disciplinas oferecidas na área, localização da(s) disciplina(s) no currículo e carga horária. Os dados obtidos foram lançados no *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 2.0* para realização da estatística descritiva.

**Resultados:** dos 738 cursos cadastrados, 88,8% são oferecidos por instituições privadas, 72% das instituições pesquisadas disponibilizavam matriz curricular do curso *on-line*, dentre essas, 47,2% apresentavam ao menos uma disciplina na área, com média de 96 horas nas instituições privadas e 142 horas nas públicas, perfazendo 2,4% e 3,5% da carga horária total do curso, respectivamente.

**Conclusão:** verificou-se a predominância de instituições privadas ofertando graduação em enfermagem e que há cursos que não oferece disciplina relacionada à Enfermagem Psiquiátrica e Saúde Mental. Notou-se também que não houve uma padronização de nomenclatura e do período para oferecimento dessa disciplina. Sugere-se pesquisas na área sobre o modo de como são ministrados os conteúdos teóricos e prático dessa disciplina.

**DESCRIPTORIOS:** Educação em enfermagem. Saúde mental. Ensino. Educação. Currículo.

# LA ENSEÑANZA DE LA ENFERMERÍA EN LA SALUD MENTAL EN BRASIL: ANÁLISIS CURRICULAR DE LA GRADUACIÓN

## RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** analizar las disciplinas de la Enfermería Psiquiátrica y Salud Mental en las estructuras curriculares de los cursos de graduación en enfermería brasileños.

**Método:** estudio exploratorio de análisis documental cuyos datos fueron obtenidos en los *websites* de las instituciones que poseen un registro en el sitio del Instituto Nacional de Estudios e Investigaciones Educativas Anísio Teixeira, a través del instrumento elaborado para ese estudio, con informaciones relacionadas a la institución, las materias ofrecidas en el área, localización de la(s) disciplina(s) en el currículo y la carga horaria. Los datos obtenidos fueron lanzados en el *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 2.0* para realización de la estadística descriptiva.

**Resultados:** de los 738 cursos registrados, el 88,8% son ofrecidos por instituciones privadas y 72% de las instituciones investigadas disponían de una matriz curricular del curso *on-line*. Entre esas, 47,2% presentaban por lo menos una disciplina en el área, con un promedio de 96 horas en las instituciones privadas y 142 horas en las públicas, llevando a cabo 2,4% y 3,5% de la carga horaria total del curso, respectivamente.

**Conclusión:** se verificó el predominio de instituciones privadas ofreciendo la graduación en enfermería y hay algunos cursos que no ofrecen ninguna disciplina relacionada con la Enfermería Psiquiátrica y la Salud Mental. También, se notó que no hubo una estandarización de la nomenclatura y del período para el ofrecimiento de esa disciplina. Se sugieren investigaciones en el área sobre cómo son enseñados los contenidos teóricos y prácticos de esa materia.

**DESCRIPTORES:** Educación en enfermería. Salud mental. Enseñanza. Educación. Currículo.

## INTRODUCTION

The Brazilian Psychiatric Reform, conceived in the late 1970s, was characterized as a historical movement marked by criticism of the classic psychiatric model and by the introduction of new care practices to overcome this paradigm. Therefore, this movement led to great changes in the nursing care provided to people with mental disorders, seeking their socialization and psychosocial rehabilitation and suggesting reordering of the psychiatric care model centered on the deinstitutionalization of the person with mental illness.<sup>1</sup>

The transition of those who suffer from mental disorders from deinstitutionalization to social insertion began to demand an integration of knowledge and practices from nursing care which allows recognition that the person is inserted in a social reality and a family context. This understanding requires adoption of the new care model to mental health during nurses' training based on overcoming the biomedical and hospital-centric model for the integrating model, which really values the biopsychosocial aspects of health care and establishes a commitment to the principles of the Unified Health System.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, this change in the mental health model becomes a strong argument in favor of the need to rethink the teaching of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing, considering that the teaching reality which is outlined does not seem to match the care demands of the new mental health care devices such as the Centers of Psychosocial Care,<sup>3-4</sup> driven by the paradigm shift in the concept of the person with mental disorders and mental health care. It is a consensus in the literature of the area that despite the expanding role of nurses in the country's new

mental health services, few of these professionals have occupied this space.<sup>3-8</sup>

As to reasons to explain the abovementioned situation, authors are unanimous in affirming that the training of these professionals to work in these places has been deficient, hindering more effective performance due to a lack of necessary competencies to perform in Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing.<sup>9</sup>

Another factor that seems to influence the current teaching of Brazilian Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing may be related to the fact that the practical teaching of these disciplines, which has deserved attention since the beginnings of modern nursing in the country, has been abolished or continues to be related to the traditional psychiatric model, in addition to a lack of teachers with specialization in the area, and a lack of specific legislation that requires practice in mental health services.<sup>9</sup>

This panorama has mainly been due to the fact that many Brazilian nursing programs are located in cities that do not have substitutive services of territorial character for mental health care,<sup>10</sup> which is performed according to the traditional, asylum model, and thus hampering pedagogical actions that are in line with the new model of mental health care.<sup>9</sup> This type of teaching ultimately adds little to the training of nurses capable of contributing to transforming the reality of mental health care in the country, with specific abilities to act within the new care devices for a person with mental disorders.

Considering the importance of characterizing the teaching of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing in the context of Brazilian undergraduate nursing curricula, and considering that the last studies specifically addressing this theme were

published in the first decade of this century, we can therefore highlight a gap regarding the current teaching situation of this discipline.<sup>3-8</sup> This period was characterized by the expansion and consolidation of new mental health care devices throughout the national territory, reviewing the results of those studies which pointed out that although the teaching of this specialization is guided by the reference of the Psychiatric Reform,<sup>10-13</sup> and on the transition from the asylum and psychiatric paradigms to the psychosocial framework,<sup>10,12-13</sup> there were also contradictions regarding which paradigm the teachers of these disciplines were using to base their teaching of this specialization.<sup>10-11,14-15</sup>

Furthermore, in view of the tendency to offer a reduced workload regarding Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing in the nursing curricula<sup>15</sup> this study aims to analyze the Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing disciplines in the curricular structures of Brazilian undergraduate nursing course.

## METHOD

This study did not involve human beings and therefore it did not require submission to the Research Ethics Committee. It is an exploratory study in which the documentary analysis technique was used. Documentary analysis makes use of materials that have not received analytical treatment or which could be re-elaborated according to the research objectives. The design of documentary research depends on the nature of the documents or procedures adopted for data interpretation.<sup>16</sup>

Data collection was carried out from January to April 2014 at the Computer Laboratory of the School of Nursing of the University of São Paulo.

The first step was to survey the number of undergraduate nursing programs in the national territory via the website of the "Anísio Teixeira" National Institute for Educational Studies and Research.<sup>17</sup> This search resulted in a total of 738 higher education institutions that offered Undergraduate Nursing programs, which corresponded to the study population. The inclusion criteria were all higher undergraduate programs in nursing registered in the "Anísio Teixeira" National Institute for Educational Studies and Research. The established exclusion criteria were Nursing programs that did not make their curriculum available on-line or the programs that would not provide their curriculum upon contact by email or telephone.

For data collection, a specific instrument was developed to achieve the research objective

with the following variables: type of educational institution - public or private; number of disciplines offered in the area of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing; nomenclature used to identify the discipline location of discipline in the curricular structure, according to the year or semester offered; theoretical and practical workload (hours); and total of the disciplines related to the topic throughout the undergraduation.

From the total number of programs found, 521 programs (70.6%) made their curriculum available online at the institutions' website, and these data were not available in 217 (29.4%). Considering the 217 institutions that did not make their curricular structures available *on-line*, and seeking to ensure that these institutions were significantly represented in the study, a random sample size calculation was performed with effect size of 0.49, 95% confidence level and 90% power,<sup>18</sup> indicating the need for an additional sample of 25 programs which did not provide their curricular structure online.

Therefore, among the 217 institutions in which the curriculum was not available online, 25 institutions were randomly selected by draw to compose the sample. An *e-mail* was sent out to the coordinators and directors of these courses/programs informing them of the purpose of the study, and requesting their curriculum by email or correspondence. At the end of the collection, 546 curricula from Brazilian nursing courses/programs were accessed, accounting for 74% of the total number of programs registered at the "Anísio Teixeira" Institute in the collection period.

The data obtained were transferred to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 2.0. A descriptive data analysis was carried out from absolute and percentage frequencies for categorical variables, in addition to measures of centrality (mean) and dispersion (standard deviation) for the numerical variables.

## RESULTS

From the 738 higher education institutions in Brazil in the year 2014 registered by the Ministry of Education that offered the Undergraduate Nursing program, 521 programs (70.6%) made their curricula available online on the institutions' website, and these data were not available in 217 (29.4%). Also, 90% (664) of the total courses/programs were from private institutions, and 10% (74) were public institutions. Of these, 95.9% had websites; and 70.6% among these made the curricula of the Nursing

program available online, according to what is recommended by the Ministry of Education.<sup>17</sup>

Among the institutions that made their curricula available in relation to the analyzed disciplines, it was observed that 25 (3.4%) did not include any discipline addressing Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing in the available curricular structure. Among those that included disciplines with this theme in their curricular structure, the majority provided only one discipline (50.3%), followed by those who provided two disciplines (14.9%). In 17 programs,

2.3% of the total offered three or more disciplines related to Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing, and no disciplines/courses related to this content were offered in 215 institutions (29.1%).

The nomenclatures of the disciplines/courses related to Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing were diverse, with the most common names used being 'Psychiatric Nursing' (*Enfermagem Psiquiátrica*) and 'Nursing in Mental Health' (*Enfermagem em Saúde Mental*) (48%) (Table 1).

**Table 1 - Nomenclatures of the disciplines/courses related to Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing on the institutions' curricula. São Paulo, SP, Brazil, 2014. (N=546)**

Nomenclatures of the disciplines/courses	N	%
<i>Enfermagem em Saúde Mental e Psiquiátrica</i>	262	48.0
<i>Assistência e Ações de Enfermagem em Psiquiatria e Saúde Mental</i>	15	2.7
<i>Atenção à Saúde Mental</i>	7	1.3
<i>Cuidado de Enfermagem em Saúde Mental</i>	29	5.3
<i>Fundamentos da Assistência de Enfermagem na Saúde Mental</i>	5	1.0
<i>O Processo de Cuidar em Saúde Mental Enfermagem Psiquiátrica</i>	14	2.5
<i>Promovendo a Saúde Mental Recuperando os Clientes com Distúrbios Psíquicos</i>	5	1.0
<i>Saúde Mental e Enfermagem Psiquiátrica</i>	110	20.1
Other nomenclatures*	99	18.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>546</b>	<b>100</b>

\* Mental Health and Interpersonal Relationships; Psychosocial and Psychiatric Attention; Psychosocial Basis of Nursing Practice; Nursing Context in Mental Health; Psychological Development and Mental Health; Nursing and Mental Health Programs; Mental Health Nursing Practice

Table 2 shows that among institutions that provided information about the year when the disciplines related to Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing were offered, 42.7% offered them in just one year. In relation to the location of the disciplines in the curricular structure of the Nursing programs,

this discipline was offered in the third year of undergraduate in 23.8% of cases; it was offered during the fourth year in 11.9%; in 5.7% during the first year; 4.2% during the second and third years; 4.2% in the third and fourth years; 1.2% in the fifth year; and 1% in the second year.

**Table 2 - Distribution of the disciplines related to Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing and in the curriculum from the institutions that provided this information, according to the year of the program in which they are offered. São Paulo, SP, Brazil, 2014. (N=738)**

Year	N=738	%
1st year	51	5.7
2nd year	7	1.0
3rd year	176	23.8
4th year	96	11.9
5th year	17	1.2
2nd and 3rd year	31	4.2
3rd and 4th year	31	4.2
Not informed*	331	44.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>738</b>	<b>100</b>

\* Institutions that did not report in the available curriculum the year in which the disciplines in the area of Mental Health and Psychiatric Nursing were offered;

The mean workload of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing disciplines according to the curricula of Brazilian nursing programs was 106 hours (SD=60.04). By analyzing the results according to the nature of the institution (public or private), it can be noticed that the total mean workload of the discipline in public institutions and including theory and practice is 142.12 hours, while the mean

workload in private institutions for this subject is 81.20 hours.

Table 3 shows the total mean workload of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing disciplines in the Brazilian nursing programs according to the nature of the institution (public and private), as well as the distribution of the workload into theoretical and practical activities.

**Table 3 - Theoretical, practical and total workload of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing disciplines, according to the nature of the educational institution (public and private). São Paulo, SP, Brazil, 2014. (N=738)**

Nature of the institution	Private			Public			Total		
	Mean	N	Standard deviation	Mean	N	Standard deviation	Mean	N	Standard deviation
Theoretical workload	81.20	306	41.7	119.38	68	91.3	88.14	374	56.0
Practical workload	49.10	108	37.3	70.36	22	37.4	52.70	130	38.0
Total workload	96.70	323	47.36	142.12	68	92.04	104.60	130	60.04

## DISCUSSION

This study aimed to analyze how disciplines related to Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing are inserted in the curricular structures of Brazilian nursing programs. It was found that programs offered by the private network predominated, which was a reality among all regions of the country.<sup>19-21</sup>

This was triggered by two political processes that began in the 1990s. The first is a process of expansion of private colleges in the country,<sup>22</sup> encouraged by a neoliberal ideology governance policy aiming at expanding the access of the Brazilian population to higher education. The second process was the increase in job offers for nurses within the

Unified Health System (SUS) with an emphasis on the Family Health Strategy,<sup>23</sup> thus attracting the necessary target audience in order to keep private institutions profitable and at the same time meeting the demands of the labor market.

The results point out that because there is no specific legislation to standardize mental health and psychiatric disciplines, there is a wide variation in their quantity ranging from one to nine distributed throughout different years of the nursing programs. Even though the vast majority of institutions contained at least one discipline regarding this specialization in their curriculum,<sup>13</sup> the fact that this study identified that more than 3% of the analyzed structures did not offer any disciplines related to the area during the nurse's entire training cannot be disregarded; even if institutions are not obliged to do so, they should offer this education in order to comprise comprehensive nursing training.

Given this scenario, we notice a trend of little interest in including the teaching of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing in training the general nurse, which should be taken into account by the competent bodies of the Ministry of Education who are responsible for authorizing new programs and revalidating existing ones, considering the impairment to nurses' training and the population that will be attended by these professionals. This is especially apparent when analyzing the current epidemiological charts and their estimates, which support the idea that mental disorders will be among the most disabling in the next decades,<sup>24</sup> therefore requiring professionals with minimum training in this area of nursing knowledge and mainly among the services of the SUS such as in Psychosocial Care Centers and other rehabilitation services.

This result may be related to the freedom for deciding on the curriculum proposed by the National Curricular Guidelines, which enables educational institutions to create their own curricular structures,<sup>15</sup> seeking to contemplate regional particularities.

However, this argument cannot serve as a guide to diminish or extinguish teaching Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing, since this situation is present in all Brazilian regions. We should also not forget the historical aspects of the discipline stigmatization, which influences its low value within the training of the generalist nurse.<sup>25</sup> This is because a specialization of nurses and teachers in mental health is rare, and many who teach these disciplines do not have any specific training,<sup>26</sup> which may compromise academic learning and lead to di-

minishing its contents compared to other curricular components.<sup>25-27</sup>

Regarding the year during the undergraduate program in which these disciplines are offered, the great majority are offered in the third and/or fourth year of undergraduation, which is consistent with previous research conducted in several Brazilian states, since there are no laws or guidelines that determine when they should be offered.<sup>11,26-27</sup> These periods can be chosen as they are characterized as the moment when student's entry into the program's professional cycle, when they have direct contact with people in both physical and mental suffering, thereby requiring a theoretical and practical base so that the student becomes sensitive to these situations and develops care skills in these cases.

This period of the program is also when students have their first contact with death, which can lead them to experiencing feelings of anxiety and fear, causing insecurity in relation to their professional choice and even possibly dropping out from the program. Therefore, the disciplines related to mental health should enable academic self-knowledge in relation to experienced feelings in the various situations that arise in exercise of the profession, in addition to having the function of providing subsidies for the development of skills for care in this field.<sup>9</sup>

Regarding the nomenclature of the disciplines/courses in the investigated curricular structures, we noticed a predominance of the term 'Nursing in mental health and/or psychiatry' (*Enfermagem em saúde mental e/ou psiquiátrica*). This result is in line with the nursing graduation courses/programs of other Latin American countries, which for the most part also use both terms and often in concomitance,<sup>25</sup> as well as referring to the history of the discipline/course which has received this nomenclature since its inception.<sup>28</sup>

It should be noted that the name 'psychiatric nursing' (*enfermagem psiquiátrica*) may point out that there are still remnants of the asylum and exclusionary approach in their contents, and some authors<sup>14</sup> claim that this denotation is associated with this status of exclusion, suggesting that it should be replaced.

The curricula of undergraduate nursing programs has undergone paradigm changes, as well as changes in the mental health care model itself, seeking to rid itself from institutionalization in the educational area, and which has influenced implementation of integrated curricula and the introduction of the term "mental health" into the nomenclature of disciplines related to psychiatric

nursing in order to indicate the reorientation of both paradigms within academia.<sup>9</sup> However, it is expected that there are changes in the practice of mental health teaching in addition to the changes in the designation of the discipline.<sup>14</sup>

Regarding the total workload of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing disciplines (104.6 credited hours), these are lower than the undergraduate nursing programs of other Latin American countries which have an average of 177 credited hours.<sup>24</sup>

When comparing the average difference in the credited hours of these disciplines offered by the Brazilian nursing undergraduate courses of public schools with the credited hours identified in those from other Latin American countries, we observe a 20% lower workload. In comparing the average of schools from other Latin American countries with the average from private schools regarding the teaching of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing, this deficit is higher than 50%.

This reduction in the discipline workload also reflects the capitalist system of education,<sup>14</sup> as it only takes into account a maximization of profits with cost reductions,<sup>29</sup> which can be represented by the decrease in the workload of disciplines to instead offer only a minimum of credited hours required by legislation in nursing programs.

The total number of credited hours dedicated to teaching the Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing discipline is small compared to other specializations that compose the undergraduate curriculum in nursing.<sup>14-15</sup> The reason for the low amount of hours in this specialization can be explained by the fact that teaching is conceived as a product of the society in which it is inserted, which is determined historically, culturally and socially, and since the mental health area has historically and traditionally been a forgotten area and little valued by society, then it is also overlooked in the area of education.<sup>29</sup>

Under this logic, teaching reflects the positions and values dictated by society,<sup>29</sup> and in that condition, what is interesting socially is more valued than what is despised or stigmatized.

In this context, the disciplines related to mental health and psychiatry are faced with this panorama determined by the social order, since these themes are socially conceived as marginalized and stigmatized, and even despite the Brazilian Psychiatric Reform they are still mistakenly associated with asylums, social outcasts or those who are not economically productive, and are therefore socially rejected.<sup>29,31</sup>

In addition, there is also the hegemony of the disciplines with a biomedical approach inherited from the old flexnerian paradigm in teaching undergraduate programs in the health area, which only sees the biological-organic view as defining the health-disease process at both the individual and collective levels.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, this conjunction of factors makes nursing education in mental and psychiatric health have less academic prestige than other curricular units, in which students are challenged with learning modern technologies and instruments capable of interacting with the patient's body and producing objective results, such as in the discipline of intensive nursing. Therefore, teaching Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing falls to the background.<sup>25</sup> This implies in academic disinterest and insufficient knowledge for training the generalist nurse, who need this knowledge to perform their functions in their daily lives even outside of specialized mental health services.<sup>25</sup>

In view of this context, these situations contribute to maintain the deficit and out-of-date knowledge of nursing students and nurses in the face of specific mental health issues such as the conception of disease and mentally ill patients based on segregation, stigma and prejudice, perpetuating the lack of interest of future nurses in this specific area and making it difficult to accept and act in multiprofessional teams, which disregard the importance of nurses' roles in mental health as well as their performance skills.<sup>11,28</sup>

Although some curricula of nursing undergraduate programs which were included in the study were not available online, the necessary data were accessed through content available on institutions' websites, which may not be representative of the teaching reality. On the other hand, the characteristics of this type of study are limited to the interpretation of secondary data, and should therefore also be considered.

The present study advances the construction of knowledge in the area of mental and psychiatric health through an analysis of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing disciplines being inserted within the curricular structures of nursing undergraduate programs, and involves a significant sample of these programs in Brazil. It provides subsidies for discussion of an unexplored topic in the second decade of this century, indicating the need for a more critical look at the workload of this specialty within the training of generalist nurses and based on a consolidation of the paradigm shift in mental

health care. Therefore, we can highlight the need for more in-depth studies on this issue.

## CONCLUSION

The results indicate that the majority of Brazilian nursing programs are offered by private institutions. Of these programs, most offered at least one discipline in the area, which for most of the institutions were concentrated in the last year of study, with an average workload of 96 credited hours in private institutions and 142 credited hours in public institutions, and with most having varied nomenclatures.

Thus, the results of this study suggest that the further studies on this subject should be conducted in order to reveal the content and how this subject is taught within the identified workload, considering that an increase in quantity is not always accompanied by improved quality. Issues such as content, teacher preparation, existence and place for the practical teaching of the discipline, in addition to references and a teaching plan should also be the objects of analysis, thereby enabling a more reliable depiction of how Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing is presented and taught in the nursing undergraduate programs throughout Brazil.

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Correspondence: Marjorie Ester Dias Maciel  
Av. Dr. Eneas de Aguiar, 789  
05403-000 - São Paulo, SP, Brasil  
E- mail: marjorieester@usp.br

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