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NURSING TECHNICIAN STUDENTS REGARDING THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE

ESTUDANTES DE CURSO TÉCNICO DE ENFERMAGEM SOB A PERSPECTIVA DE GÊNERO

ESTUDIANTES DE CURSO TÉCNICO DE ENFERMERÍA AL RESPECTO DE LA PERSPECTIVA DE GÉNERO

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to describe the profile of students of a nursing technical course regarding the gender perspective. **Method:** a descriptive study with a qualitative approach, carried out from November 2010 to March 2011 with 98 students of a private nursing technical course. For data collection we used a sociodemographic questionnaire. The research project was approved by the Research Ethics Committee, under protocol number 030/2010. **Results:** the population of students of the technical nursing course is composed of young adults (19 to 25 years old), mostly women, students, Catholic, brown color and with family income between one and two minimum salaries. **Conclusion:** it was observed the conservation of the feminization of this profession. The sociodemographic characteristics revealed that the student group is not united only by student status of the same course but also by socioeconomic, religious, and cultural conditions that demarcate similar experiences in the context of life and social constructions of gender. **Descriptors:** Technical Nursing Education; Nursing; Gender Identity.

RESUMO

Objetivo: descrever o perfil de estudantes de um curso técnico de enfermagem no que diz respeito à perspectiva de gênero. **Método:** estudo descritivo, com abordagem qualitativa, realizado no período de novembro de 2010 a março de 2011 com 98 estudantes de um curso técnico de enfermagem privado. Para a coleta de dados, foi utilizado um questionário sociodemográfico. O projeto de pesquisa foi aprovado pelo Comitê de Ética em Pesquisa, protocolo nº 030/2010. **Resultados:** a população de estudantes do curso técnico de enfermagem é formada por adultos jovens (19 a 25 anos), majoritariamente, mulheres, estudantes, católicas, de cor parda e com renda familiar entre um e dois salários mínimos. **Conclusão:** observou-se a conservação da feminização desta profissão. Os aspectos sociodemográficos revelaram que o grupo de estudantes não está unido apenas pela condição de discente do mesmo curso, mas também por condições socioeconômicas, religiosas e culturais que demarcam experiências similares no contexto de vida e de construções sociais de gênero. **Descritores:** Educação Técnica de Enfermagem; Enfermagem; Identidade de Gênero.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: describir el perfil de estudiantes de un curso técnico de enfermeira al respecto de la perspectiva de género. **Método:** estudio descriptivo, con enfoque cualitativo, realizado en el período de noviembre de 2010 a marzo de 2011 con 98 estudiantes de un curso técnico privado de enfermería. Para recoger los datos, fue utilizado un cuestionario socio-demográfico. El proyecto de investigación fue aprobado por el Comité de Ética en Investigación, protocolo nº 030/2010. **Resultados:** la población de estudiantes del curso técnico de enfermería es formada por adultos jóvenes (19 a 25 años), mayoritariamente, mujeres, estudiantes, católicas, de color pardo y con renda familiar entre uno y dos salarios mínimos. **Conclusión:** se observó la conservación de la feminización de esta profesión. Los aspectos socio-demográficos revelaron que el grupo de estudiantes no está unido apenas por la condición de discente del mismo curso pero también por condiciones socio-económicas, religiosas y culturales que demarcan experiencias similares en el contexto de vida y de construcciones sociales de género. **Descritores:** Educación Técnica de Enfermería; Enfermería; Identidad de Género.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, nursing has been divided by the growth of health care techniques, by the rationality of medical services, by the struggle of social groups by the rise in the social scale for instruction and intellectualization with progressive technical division of labor in capitalist societies. In this context, the following categories existed together: nurses, nursing attendants, assistants and technicians.

Before that, when teaching nursing practice in a capitalist context, through school, two divisions occurred: the first related to education versus the practice, which has teaching as holder of knowledge and practice as disqualified manual labor; and the second, in the twentieth century, was related to teaching divided into degrees, from the most complex, which refers to higher education, which reinforces the division of intellectual and manual labor to the simplest, and is equivalent to people without education, i.e., to care attendants, people who had just made trainings or had experiences.¹

The inclusion of nursing assistant as the earliest professional level comes from the formalization of training comparable to that of higher education in Brazil with the main justification of the existence of few nurses to work in direct care, being regulated by Law 775/49, that regulates the higher education level nursing courses.² In the 1960s, another professional level arises, the nursing technician, in order to foster the technical progress of high school level, which further increases the division of labor in nursing with the argument of offering a better service to the needs of the assisted person.¹

The nursing attendant classification became extinct with the advent of Law 7.498/86, which provides for the regulation of nursing profession, remaining the following classifications: nurse, nursing technician, nursing assistant and midwife.³

The nursing technician represents a significant number of the nursing workforce⁴ and plays a key role to the client in prevention, promotion and health recovery. Still, according to Peduzzi⁵ the profile of technicians requires cognitive, technical and affective skills, inter-relationship with customers and other employees, as well as initiative and creativity, however, the knowledge of the peculiarities of this professional group since its formation is necessary in order to adapt the qualification

of that social group to ensure better actions and working conditions.

The use of sociodemographic indicators has an important role in determining the social collectivities⁶, as the set of information generated by demographic studies generate analyzes of the living conditions of a population.⁷ Added to this, we also consider gender aspects, which are constituent elements of social relations based on the differences that distinguish the sexes and a primary way of signifying power relationships, in which women are in a position of inferiority when compared to men.⁸⁻¹⁰

Starting from this premise, the question arises: before the increased demand for nursing technicians and expansion of vocational training courses, which is the technical nursing students profile from a gender perspective? In this sense, this study has the general objective: describing the profile of nursing technicians students regarding the gender perspective. It was established as a specific goal: to identify the sociodemographic characteristics of students of a nursing technical course.

We chose for students of technical nursing course as participants in this study mainly due to the lack of studies with this group of people. This professional category in many instances is devalued and excluded from decision-making processes, remaining for them only to receive and respect the rules and orders, pre-established and decided without their participation.⁴ Therefore, research on technical nursing students are required because of the relevance of health practice of this category to customers and so that proposed transformation of professional practice since the moment of formation may arise.

This study becomes relevant considering that the professional practice permeates the field of knowledge and subjectivity, reflecting beliefs, experiences, feelings and ideologies, therefore, the class, race and gender values along the trajectory of each student and future professionals will be inserted into the work practice with the theoretical knowledge and the technical virtues. So, knowing these values can assist in the work process of these professionals by introducing new educational approach strategies that are appropriate to the profile of the target population.

METHOD

Article drawn from the dissertation << Social representations of students of technical nursing course on the problem of drugs >> presented to the Graduate Program in

Nursing, School of Nursing of the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA)/BA, Brazil, in 2011.

This is a descriptive study with qualitative approach. It is cutting of a dissertation¹¹, developed in the city of Salvador - Bahia, in a private nursing technical course after approval to carry out the research from the Nursing Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Bahia under protocol No. 030/2010.

The course offered by the educational institution lasts twenty-four months and is taught in four semesters, for groups ranging from twenty to forty students. Each semester comprises certain disciplines and internships that are prerequisites for the student to continue with the next semester until the degree of nursing technician in the end of the course.

The course has varied curriculum with a total workload of 1,820 hours, 1,220 hours aimed at theory and 600h for practical activities in the Brazilian health care system (SUS), such as in hospitals, primary care units, maternities and ambulatories. The course works in the morning, afternoon and night shifts, and serves an average of 250 students per year.

The study population consisted of 98 students who were included in the total of subjects of this nursing technical course, who attended and were duly enrolled.

Data collection was held from November 2010 to March 2011, using the sociodemographic questionnaire, which is a component of the instrument Free Association of Words Test (FAWT), applied collectively in the classroom.

The Free Association of Words Test is an interrogative technique, of rapid implementation and easy to understand. It is widely used in research on social representations and allows harvesting elements through spontaneous verbal expressions less controlled and more authentic, that would be lost or masked in discursive productions¹².

The sociodemographic questionnaire, comprised data such as gender, age, marital status, religion, family income, self-declared skin color, professional performance and time of performance (when the participant worked in health area), and was applied collectively in the classroom.

The data from this research were processed in STATA statistical software, version 8.0 and

organized according to the following variables: gender, age, family income, self-declared skin color, occupation in the labor market and activities in the health area. From the results, an analysis was carried out on gender perspective.

RESULTS

Even though all students of the research have completed high school, for this education is required as a prerequisite for the technical nursing course, we realized during the collection and analysis of data that the studied social group presents great difficulty with Portuguese, both in the writing and in relation to speech. This reflects the shortfall in the education of high and elementary schools of the city.

The studied social group, according to Table 1, was composed primarily of females. The disproportion in the number of participants related to sex, linked to gender issues were fundamental in adopting the terminology in the feminine gender when referencing the group studied in the presentation of the results of this research, i.e., we will use grammatical articles that indicate female nouns, such as the participants, the pupils [in Portuguese, there are different definite articles for masculine and for feminine nouns].

The participants are mostly young and the median age was around 26 years old. A total of 87.7% of respondents declared themselves belonging to the black race, that is, black and brown.

The family income of the participants were classified based on the minimum wage (MW) established by the Presidency of the Brazilian Republic in the amount of R\$ 510.00 (five hundred and ten reais), in force in the months of the collection of FAWT. Thus, the major proportion was concentrated in more than 1 and less than 2 MW.

As for the type of occupation of the participants, the largest number is student, followed by working in health care, whether with paid and/or performing academic activities (Table 1).

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of students of a nursing technical course (Salvador-BA), October/2010 to March/2011 (n = 98).

Characterstic	n (%)
Sex	
Male	08 (8.2)
Female	90 (91.8)
Age group (in years)	
19 to 25	44 (44.9)
26 to 31	31 (31.6)
32 to 37	14 (14.3)
38 years old and older	09 (9.2)
Race (self-referred)	
White	05 (5.1)
Black	37 (37.7)
Brown	49 (50.0)
Yellow	03 (3.1)
Indigenous	01 (1.0)
Did not respond	03 (3.1)
Religion	
Catholic	55 (56.1)
Protestant	25 (25.5)
Without religion	06 (6.1)
Other religions	07 (7.2)
Did not respond	05 (5.1)
Family income (in minimum wages)	
Less than 1 MW	24 (24.5)
1 to 2 MW	51 (52.0)
More than 2 MW	19 (19.4)
Did not respond	04 (4.1)
Main activity currently playing	
Student	42 (42.9)
Worker in the services	14 (14.3)
Seller or merchant services provider	11 (11.2)
Maid	10 (10.2)
Freelancer	01 (1.0)
Working in the healthcare/internship	18 (18.4)
Without information	02 (2.0)
Place of birth	
Salvador	43 (49.4)
Other cities of Bahia	37 (42.5)
Other regions	07 (8.1)

Of the 18 participants who reported working in healthcare, some revealed developing activities in households as caretakers of elderly or children. Others work in hospitals or are working in clinics or health

clinics, exercising aid activity from reception to instrumentation for procedures.

The data presented in Table 2 characterize the social group as the professional performance in health area, time and place of activity.

Table 2. Distribution of students who perform activities in the health area as to the place and time, Salvador-BA, October/2010 to March/2011 (n=98).

Characteristic	n (%)
Working in health area	
Yes	18 (18.4)
No	80 (81.6)
Time (in years) (n=18)	
Up to 1 year	05 (27.7)
1 to 2 years	04 (22.2)
3 to 4 years	03 (16.7)
5 years or more	03 (16.7)
Did not respond	03 (16.7)
Place (n=18)	
Household	09 (50.0)
Clinics/medical offices	02 (11.1)
Hospital	04 (22.2)
PSF	01 (5.6)
Did not respond	02 (11.1)

DISCUSSION

Given what has been presented, it is observed that the studied social group is marked by historical unequal gender relations. Initially, we observed the perpetuation of the female character of the nursing profession and more specifically the nursing technician professional. Such information is consistent with two studies with technical nursing students who have mostly females in the characterization of the studied group^{13,14}.

The average age around 26 years old describes this social group as consisted of young individuals seeking some professional qualification, and the demand in the labor market is from 19 years of age, i.e., after completing high school.

The self-declared skin color was portrayed as an important item during the collection, because many of the participants had difficulties to define their skin color. As the classification of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), skin colors are black, brown, white, yellow and indigenous, but on common sense there are many variations on the skin color, and terms such as brunette, moreninha, mulatto, among others are very used. In the collective application of FAWT, some people did not answer this question, illustrating the problems associated with socially constructed aspects of color, race and racism in Brazil.

There is still predominance of Catholic people in Brazil, even with a recent decline in the prevalence of this religion¹⁵. This is confirmed with the predominant profile found in the social group studied, and this is believed to be a result of colonization, with influence of the Catholic Church in politics and social life of the people, also reflecting in spontaneous responses according to the majoritarian historical profile of this religion.

The vast majority (76.5%) has an income of less than two minimum wages, thus showing that most of these students are inserted in the social stratum of low income. The type of occupation of the participants revealed that the choice for professional training permeates various life trajectories, uniting in this course both people who only study with those working in different areas but that play unsatisfactory and/or subordinate occupations. At this juncture, the intersectionality of race and class inequalities continues to exist, and consists of interactivity of forms of subordination, which have the reflection as consequences of the interaction of two or more forms of discrimination, that is, discrimination of race

and gender. It is a definition of the problem or the condition in which it is searched the results of the association between two or more forms of discrimination.¹⁶

The female predominance in the studied group portrays the gender issue that permeates nursing since its inception. According to Lopes and Luis¹⁷, the feminization of Brazilian nursing persists over the years and has been marked by the sexual division of labor, and is grounded on the social and cultural construction that determines roles and functions for men and women, in which is assigned to women the role of "caretaker".

The concept of gender is designed to indicate the relationships between people permeated by characteristics designated by the differences between the sexes. These relationships are historically reproduced through institutions and social processes, which can override the existing inequalities. In this context, the vocational training can be cited as one of the products and consequences, as compared to study participants.

The gender has as implicit elements for its understanding: its historicity, which is changeable and is changing; and power, whose relations are based on the supremacy of one over another individual, but there are ways to enable changes in this power relationship.

Institutions, such as the family, perpetuate historically impregnated values of gender inequality, however, through the feminist movement, studies and discussions, one can intervene transforming, even if gradually, these values, changing the picture of gender and also of race and class inequalities. After all, these differences intersect (intersectionality), including in the social processes and in institutions.

Thus, a person who builds their gender identity among the conditions of race and class of their life context can be considered products of these social constructions, which reflects in their training and professional performance. After all, these depend on: their gender, sex and on the relationships involving these facts; their racial and socioeconomic status, so the women, who constitute the majority of participants in this study, are referred to as the image of the nursing profession because, historically, they hold the object of care, which is, according to Tronto¹⁸, a dynamic focused in gender, whether in the labor market or in private life. Thus, women accumulate, as gender identity

socially constructed, assignments of "taking care of" and men of "being careful".

It is noticed that the fact that most of the research participants being female confirms the feminization of the nursing profession in its various categories. The little variation from other sociodemographic aspects that characterize the social group under study reveals that it is not united only by studying in the same nursing technical course but also by economic, religious and cultural conditions that demarcate similar experiences in life context.

CONCLUSION

The information presented indicate that the population of students of the technical nursing course is made up of young adults, mostly women, students, Catholic, of mixed ethnicity and family income between one and two minimum salaries. Family income and employment activities performed by participants, combined with sociodemographic characteristics, portray the social, economic and cultural reality in which the group is inserted.

The feminization of this profession, as well as sociodemographic aspects, show that the group is united by socioeconomic, religious and cultural conditions that demarcate similar experiences in the context of life and gender conditions built and entrenched in knowledge and in social practice that reflect in the nursing profession.

From this characterization based on the gender perspective, it is possible to act academically, in order to adapt and/or influence teaching methodologies, seeking to sensitize professionals since the formation, providing people better prepared to assume their roles in the labor market. Therefore, due to the thought socially constructed of assignments linked to care for this group, it is relevant to stimulate, even in the training process, care linked to critical thinking and to the socially constructed gender issues, so that actions of these professionals are not limited to technical skills, and consequently, the actions are purely mechanized, but rather, that these subjects are participatory, critical and transformers. In this sense, it is important to know the profile of the professionals who have been trained, as the acquisition of knowledge and the consequent training of these professionals will be determined by socioeconomic, cultural and individual factors of each subject.

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