Abstract

Background: Understanding the theoretical bases of nursing requires first an approximation about some foundational aspects, namely concepts, theories and theoretical models. From the applicability of the founding elements, we can see, know and understand factors that influence the processes needed for the right decision-making, the opposite of practical situations.

Objective: To know the tendencies of the publications about nursing theories, theoretical models and related concepts in a scientific journal of nursing.

Methods and Findings: An integrative review was performed on the website of the journal *Acta Paulista de Enfermagem*, via ScieLO, from 2005 to 2014. The sample included 21 studies that addressed the application, analysis, construction, validation or reflection on concepts, theoretical models and nursing theories. Of the publications, 42.8% came from the Northeast region and 76.2% contemplated the qualitative approach. The studies worked with theories (76.2%), with analysis, construction and validation of theoretical models (14.3%), and concept elaboration (9.5%). 2005 and 2011 represented the years with the largest publications, however a decrease has occurred in the last three years.

Conclusion: The trends highlighted the importance of the development and application of the theoretical and philosophical bases of nursing, since it is necessary to strengthen the link between theoretical and practical research.
Introduction

The theoretical bases, as foundations existent in all the sciences, have as purpose to help the understanding of the real phenomena. In nursing science, the use of such bases can strengthen more effective practices that are capable of responding to the more differentiated care needs of the subjects.

In this sense, we can observe changes in the population context, evidencing its growth and heterogeneity, as well as changes in the health-disease process. Such facts become a challenge for the practice of nursing, which needs the theoretical bases to develop its assistance activities in an effective way.

Thus, knowing the theories is important in order to explain, describe, diagnose and/or prescribe actions for the nursing care practice, articulating scientific knowledge to the activities of the profession [1]. In addition, the current trend of emphasis in nursing research, sees the greater relevance of the link between nursing theories and research [2].

With regard to the exercise of thinking, the use of nursing theories leads us to the understanding that the challenges that emerge from the everyday reality of their practices are not dissociated from the way professionals are prepared to face them, thus guiding actions for understanding people, which can facilitate the acquisition of skills for professional health and significant changes in context, allowing greater chances in achieving the objectives and goals (3). To continue the process of development of nursing as a profession and science is necessary inter-relation between theory, research and clinical practice [1].

Since nursing is a recent discipline and a science in constant development, understanding its structural basis not only collaborates with the acquisition of a global notion in this aspect, but it helps us to know and understand the limitations and advances that nursing has experimented in the search of associating the potential of information to reality, to make feasible the strengths and to minimize the repercussion of the implementation of the points still in limitation.

Understanding the theoretical bases of nursing requires first an approximation about some foundational aspects, namely concepts, theories and theoretical model. It is assumed that concepts, characterized by dynamicity and variability, must be constructed through the meaning of words, and must be inserted in a context so that meaning and application are possible, contributing to the advancement of knowledge in a certain area. In theory, we understand a set of concepts that intend the systematic aspect of the phenomenon, which describe, explain, diagnose and prescribe measures for the practice of care, offering scientific support for the actions of a given discipline [1].

A theoretical model is a conceptual representation of reality, emphasizing that it is not reality in itself, but an abstract and reconstructed reproduction from reality and it is a set of interrelated concepts that symbolically represent and transmit the image of a phenomenon. It is also possible that a model shows the characteristics of a discipline and provides guidelines for the set of laws that are selected to form a theoretical system [4].

From the applicability of the founding elements mentioned above, we can see, know and understand factors that influence the processes needed for the right decision-making, the opposite of practical situations.

In this context, with a view to tracing the panorama of the phenomena related to the use of structuring elements of theoretical bases of nursing for professional practice, with emphasis on concept, theoretical model and theory, it occurred to the approach with the object of study.

Thus, it is justified to carry out this work, or the limitation of studies that bring subsidies about this aspect in Brazil, or the importance that this gives to future perceptions of nurses in the practice of care practice.
It is also mentioned as justification the researchers' own interest in the subject, culminating with the moment in which they are attending a Masters in Nursing, having the opportunity to reflect on the theoretical bases of nursing through the disciplines and readings of this course. These reflections instigated the authors to know different basal sources and, in particular, direct the curiosity to understand how this fact is being worked on in the Brazilian journal *ACTA Paulista de Enfermagem*.

Thus, the objective of this study is to know the trends in relation to publications about nursing theories, theoretical models and related concepts in a scientific journal of nursing.

**Methods**

This is an integrative review of the literature, which included the following steps: preparation of the introduction, formulation of objectives and guiding question, description of methodology, analysis and interpretation of data, presentation, discussion and dissemination of results. This methodological rigor is necessary so that the product from the integrative review can bring relevant contributions both to science and to clinical practice [5].

The guiding question of the research was: what is the state of the art of scientific production on nursing theories in the Brazilian journal *ACTA Paulista de Enfermagem*?

For the literature search, first set up the magazine mentioned as a basis, as the representative of this as a source of dissemination of nursing knowledge.

The bibliographic research was conducted in two stages. Initially, access to the electronic page of the journal, via Scientific Electronic Library Online (ScieLO), raising all original articles published between 2005 and 2014, being opted for this period due to the availability of publications via online. With this, 55 issues were raised, which contained a total of 839 articles. During the second moment, that the manual data collection was configured, the sources were selected according to the reflexive critical analysis processed by reading the title, summary and keywords found in the articles. The doubts were corrected by appreciation of the articles in full, emphasizing that in order to focus the investigation, searches were made located in the text with the words: theory, model and concept.

Inclusion criteria were: original article; Apply, analyze, construct, validate or reflect on theories, theoretical models and concept in nursing. And as criteria of exclusion: approach non-nursing theory, unavailability of the text in its entirety, use nursing theories only as a citation in the study. Thus, of the 839 original articles, 818 were excluded and 21 composed the literature sample for the analysis of this study.

Data were analyzed by extracting the variables for bibliometric presentation (authorship of the article, study title, volume, number and year of publication in the journal, origin of the publication and study approach) and variables related to meeting the objectives of the study, from the use of the structuring elements of theoretical bases of nursing (concept, theory and/or model); Critical appreciation (clarity of theoretical elements, coherence of methodology, theoretical models based on theories, concepts based on methods, and indication of limits and potentialities); And evaluation of the stage of the study that contemplated the theory; Synthesis of the studies; Theory; Theoretical model and concept involved.

**Results**

Twenty-one publications were included in this review, and the results obtained related to the variables for bibliometric presentation are visualized in Frame 1, in which author (s), year of publication, title, volume, number, study approach and origin of articles.
In relation to the analysis of the dates, the articles are published as of 2005 (19.0%), which stands out for the highest concentration of studies, together with 2011 (19.0%), then the year that stands out is 2009 with 14.4%, accompanied by the years 2008, 2010, 2012 and 2014, each with two articles (9.5%) published. The years 2006 and 2007 represent the lowest percentage of production, with a representativity of 4.8%.

It is also verified that the methodological approach that most contemplated the phenomenon of the study was the qualitative one with 76.2%, followed by 23.8% quantitative.

As to the origin of the publications, it was observed that the Federal University of Ceará presented 38.0%, the Federal University of Santa Catarina 14.2% and then the Federal University of Paraná 9.4%. He presented with 4.8% the following institutions: Federal University of Santa Maria, University of São Paulo, Federal University of São Paulo, University of São Paulo at Ribeirão Preto, State University of Maringá, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, State University of Ceará, Ege University School of Nursing.

Frame 2 includes the variables on the general synthesis of the studies, and indicates the theory, theoretical model or concept used.

Of the 21 sources investigated, two (9.5%) considered concepts, three (14.3%) contemplated theoretical models related to nursing, and the majority was about nursing theories, making a total of 16 articles (76.2%).

From the two literatures that worked with concepts, one analyzed the concept of fatigue, identifying its critical attributes, pointing antecedents, consequent and empirical references, and an article analyzed the concept of risk for breast cancer in nursing research.

About three articles contemplated models related to nursing, one analyzed the diagram of the health promotion model, a built an explanatory theoretical model of care system and other validated a theoretical model based on a study of interactive processes in the support network people with tuberculosis.

In the 16 literatures that presented the theory as north of structuring, 10 theories were differentiated. It was evidenced that two articles (12.6%) worked with the Theory of Universality and Cultural Diversity of Care, two articles (12.6%) worked with Roy’s Theory, five articles (31.4%) addressed the Theory Of Orem and seven articles (each representing 6.2%) with other theories, namely: Theory of Virginia Henderson, Levine’s Theory, Nursing Care Theory as an Entrepreneurial Social Practice, Mayeroff Theory, Leininger’s Theory, Peterson and Zderad and Jean Watson’s Theory.

Frame 3 summarizes the variables: use of the structuring elements of the theoretical bases of nursing, critical appreciation and stage of the study that contemplated the theory.

The results of Frame 3 allow us to show that, according to the variable “use of the structuring elements of theoretical bases of nursing”, 76.2% of the publications covered nursing theories, 9.5% analyzed concept, 4.8% analyzed theoretical model and 9.5% constructed nursing models.

According to the critical assessment, the articles that included nursing theories clearly present and use the appropriate methodology to achieve the study objectives, of which 93.8% applied a nursing theory and only 6.2% to the construct. To the theoretical model requirement, the models are clearly explained, theories were used to support these models, but only one article points out its limits and potentialities while the other only signals the potentialities. Referring to the analysis of concepts and theoretical model, they were based on the steps of the methodology proposed by Walker and Avant and Meleis.

Regarding the variable “stage of the study that contemplated the theory”, 61.9% of the articles contemplated theory in all stages of the study, 9.5% inserted theory only in methodology, results, discussion and conclusion, 4.8% including the theory.
in the introduction, results, discussion and conclusion and 23.8% does not apply to this characterization, since they are the construction of concepts and theoretical models and analysis of concepts and theoretical models.

**Discussion**

Some studies have pointed to analysis of specific concepts and theoretical models, development and analysis of theories and efforts to link these theories to their respective practical areas. These results, however, need to be interpreted with caution because this commentary is limited to articles published during the past nine years in only one nursing journal and because the review criteria have been purposely chosen to reflect this approach.

We noticed that most of the studies contemplated nursing theories, and this fact evidenced that the use of these theories as a theoretical reference, as a methodological path and/or as conceptual basis for the analysis of the researches in the area, was essential to facilitate the elaboration of new knowledge related to the specificities and peculiarities of the context of professional practice [4].

The analysis of the year of publication in Frame 1 showed that the studies about theoretical models and concepts were irregular throughout the period determined for this investigation. However, even though it was irregular, it was possible to observe that there were publications since 2005 (year in which the magazine made the articles available on the Internet) until 2014, except for the year 2013, in which no article was identified. Differently from other studies on nursing theories, in which there has been an increasing trend since the year 2002 [27].

Regarding the studies approach, there was a qualitative prevalence, and this has to do with the tendency of nursing itself, in which the object of study of the articles concerns subjective aspects of care, such as studies of perceptions, experiences and understanding [28].

In the analyzed studies, the Northeast, exclusively Ceará, stood out with 42.8% of the articles, in which the Federal University of Ceará (38.0%) and the State University of Ceará (4.8%) were the units of origin of publications. Then the south region with 33.2%, represented by the Federal University of Santa Catarina (14.2%), State University of Maringá (4.8%), Federal University of Paraná (9.4%), and the University of Santa Maria (4.8%). Third, it was evidenced the Southeast region, which had 19.2% of the studies, composed by the University of São Paulo, Federal University of São Paulo, University of São Paulo of Ribeirão Preto and Federal University of Rio de Janeiro with 4.8% of published articles. A publication (4.8%) of international origin was still found, originating from Ege University School of Nursing, Turkey. The evidences identified corroborate with another review study, which analyzed articles of nursing theories published in the country, and report that the publications on the subject come from, especially from the northeastern and south regions of Brazil [27].

In general, the prevalence of studies came from universities with masters and doctoral courses, which contributed to the production of papers on this subject. In this way the research groups and the graduate programs reflected important knowledge producers.

The articles investigated pointed to the use of a theory as the basis for the development of theoretical models, however only one article pointed out its limits and potentialities. In this sense, it is emphasized that the potentialities and limitations of theories must be contained in the study of theoretical models, since they allow to explain the results found, making it possible to critically analyze the possible empirical results of the studies [29].

The publications that approached theoretical models were well conducted because they were in line with some theory, since it is important the theoretical explanation to reveal how and why things work, as well as the purpose of a variable that may be related to another [29].
The articles that did a concept analysis and model were based on the method of Walker and Avant and Meleis. These findings imply that the articles were well conducted, since both analysis and concept development should follow a method or more methods [4]. In these studies, the concepts analyzed were about elements used in nursing practice, and this aspect pointed out that the profession, as a science, should research on such concepts for the continuity of its evolution. Authors also pointed out that the development of concepts and analyzes will contribute to the later identification of the central or substantive concepts in nursing, and that it is therefore necessary to continue the efforts to develop several types of theories [2].

Dorothea E. Orem’s theory, classified as a great theory [4], was the most contemplated in the studies analyzed, and this information was evidenced by other authors, who said that this theory has guided the practice of Brazilian nursing, and also pointed out The reasons for this use, in which Orem made possible the development of attitudes that enabled the individuals to self-care, based on an educational action of the nurse; And due to the advancement of chronic disease conditions in the population that have required individuals to use long-term treatment, the use of home-based technologies and the restructuring of lifestyles as ways of caring for oneself [27, 30]. However, another study differed from the results found, pointing to Roy’s theory as the most used [2].

In the analyzed publications it was evidenced the predominance of the use of great theories, which corresponds to the highest level of abstraction, corroborating with other studies [2]. These theories are relevant references for the foundation of professional theory and practice, as they presented a vision for the experiences of individuals and communities that were involved in the complex health-disease phenomena, as well as stimulating the production of knowledge that directed alternatives to the difficulties of practices of nursing and the overcoming of the paradigm that guided health institutions [27]. However, this predominance also indicated that nursing is still limited to the use of the great theories, signaling the importance of the development of medium and practical theories that cover the amplitude of the contexts that the nursing is inserted.

**Conclusion**

The main trends show the irregularity in the productions about this theme in recent years, despite the existence of publications throughout the period investigated, predominance in the Northeast and South of Brazil and prevalence of the qualitative approach.

It was possible to identify that the publications come from universities, for the incentive on the subject in the graduate programs. However, it is important that nurses in all areas, not only research, study, use, develop and apply nursing theories in their practice.

It was also evidenced that most of the articles covered nursing theories, of which Dorothea E. Orem’s theory predominates, which has been used as a theoretical-philosophical basis to guide various practical situations. However, the use is limited to the great theories, thus, nursing must also use and develop medium and practical theories, appropriating the founding concepts of theories, to consolidate and strengthen nursing.

Thus, the importance of the development and application of the elements of the theoretical and philosophical bases of nursing is highlighted, since it is necessary to strengthen the link between theoretical research and practice.

**Acknowledgements**

Provost of Graduation and Research of Universidade Regional do Cariri, Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES), Collective
Health Research Group and Faculty of Medicine of the University of Cariri (UFCA).

**Conflict of interest**
The authors declare no conflicting of interest.

**Role of the funding source**
We have no fundation source.

**References**


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