

DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS IN NURSING THESES: DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES AND RESEARCH METHODS

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ABSTRACT: Objective: to characterize the use of documentary analysis in theses defended in the Postgraduate Programs in Nursing in Brazil. Method: bibliometric study undertaken in the Theses Database of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel and on the Sucupira Platform, in January 2017. Of the 463 theses found, 95 met the study objective. They were organized and analyzed, between February and June 2017, using Microsoft Excel®, and contained the following items: Higher Education Institute; title, authors, year and supervisor; theoretical framework; type/nature of the study; document analyzed, complementary techniques/methods and use of documentary analysis. Results: documentary analysis is being used predominantly as a technique for collecting and analyzing data, complementing other techniques, and is applied little as a method. Of the theses, 61 (64.21%) had a qualitative design. Conclusion: documentary analysis makes it possible to formulate empirical evidence through examining documents elaborated by nurses, contributing to the strengthening of nursing as a profession.

DESCRIPTORS: Nursing Research; Bibliometrics; Documents.

ANÁLISE DOCUMENTAL NAS TESES DE ENFERMAGEM: TÉCNICA DE COLETA DE DADOS E MÉTODO DE PESQUISA

RESUMO: Objetivo: caracterizar a utilização da análise documental em teses defendidas nos Programas de Pós-Graduação em Enfermagem no Brasil. Método: estudo bibliométrico realizado no Banco de Teses da Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento Pessoal de Nível Superior e na Plataforma Sucupira, no mês de janeiro de 2017. Das 463 teses encontradas, 95 corresponderam ao objetivo do estudo, sendo organizadas e analisadas, de fevereiro a junho de 2017, no Microsoft Excel®, contendo os itens: Instituição de Ensino Superior; título, autores, ano e orientador; referencial teórico; tipo/natureza da pesquisa; documento analisado, técnicas/métodos complementares e uso da análise documental. Resultados: a análise documental está sendo utilizada predominantemente como técnica de coleta e análise de dados, de modo complementar outras técnicas, e pouco aplicada como método. Das teses, 61 (64,21%) tiveram delineamento qualitativo. Conclusão: a análise documental possibilita a formulação de evidências empíricas ao examinar documentos elaborados pela enfermagem, contribuindo para o seu fortalecimento como profissão.

DESCRIÇÕES: Pesquisa em Enfermagem; Bibliometria; Documentos.

ANÁLISIS DOCUMENTAL EN LAS TESIS DE ENFERMERÍA: TÉCNICA DE OBTENCIÓN DE DATOS Y MÉTODO DE INVESTIGACIÓN

RESUMEN: Objetivo: Caracterizar la utilización del análisis documental en tesis defendidas en los Programas de Posgrado en Enfermería en Brasil. Método: Estudio bibliométrico realizado en el Banco de Tesis de la Coordinación de Perfeccionamiento Personal de Nivel Superior y la Plataforma Sucupira, en el mes de enero de 2017. De las 463 tesis investigadas, 95 correspondieron al objetivo del estudio, siendo organizadas y analizadas, de febrero a junio de 2017, en Microsoft Excel®, con los ítems: Institución de Enseñanza Superior; título, autores, año y orientador; referencial teórico; tipo/naturaleza de la investigación; documento analizado, técnicas/métodos complementarios y uso del análisis documental. Resultados: El análisis documental es utilizado predominantemente como técnica de obtención y análisis de datos, de modo complementario otras técnicas, y poco aplicada como método. De las tesis, 61 (64,21%) presentaron delineación cualitativa. Conclusión: El análisis documental posibilita la formulación de evidencias empíricas por medio del examen de documentos elaborados por la enfermería, contribuyendo para su fortalecimiento como profesión.

DESCRIPTORES: Investigación en Enfermería; Bibliometría; Documentos.

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● INTRODUCTION

Documentary analysis is a procedure which encompasses the identification, verification and consideration of documents which are related to the object investigated⁽¹⁾. Its use promotes the observation of the process of maturation or evolution of individuals, groups, concepts, knowledges, behaviors, mentalities and practices – among others⁽²⁾.

Its main function is to contextualize facts, situations or points in time and to lead to the adoption of new panoramas in other environments; it should take an objective reflection from the original source, and allow the localization, identification, organization and evaluation of the information contained in the document, thus comprising a systematic process of the collection, treatment and analysis of information⁽²⁾.

The use of documents in research is valued due to the richness of the information extracted, and because it broadens the understanding regarding the object under investigation⁽³⁾. Documents are vestiges of the past, which serve as witnesses and which allow one to extend the coverage of time in the social comprehension⁽¹⁾.

Although documentary analysis has similarities with bibliographic research, it is worth emphasizing the component that differentiates the two methods. Bibliographic research uses secondary resources, seeking contributions for a specified theme from the perspective of different authors, while research with documents uses primary sources, that is to say, materials which have not yet undergone analytical treatment⁽³⁾.

Investigation in documentary analysis requires assessment of the context of the documents' production – of their authorship, nature and provenance. Analyzing documents entails analyzing the perspective of the person who produced the documents, in the place of their production, which requires care and expertise on the part of the researcher. Similarly, the nature of a document (in juridical, technical, historical terms, etc.) must be taken into account at the time of analysis, with the researcher taking steps to ensure the document's authenticity and trustworthiness⁽³⁾.

Documentary analysis is, concomitantly, both a technique for collecting and analyzing data – and a research method. As a technique for data collection and analysis, it is used to complement other means of collecting and analyzing data, with a view to making the study object easier to understand. As a research method, it presupposes a focus which will serve as a basis for an investigation, and may be used as a rigorous methodological path for the study^(1,4).

Research in nursing makes use of various methodologies for investigating its objects of interest. Documentary analysis is a highly normal typology in its studies. This methodology has made it possible to increase the depth of theoretical understanding in specific topics, through the use of documents from different sources, such as curricular guidelines⁽⁵⁻⁶⁾, articles⁽⁷⁻⁸⁾, journals⁽⁹⁾, nursing records in patients' medical notes⁽¹⁰⁾, nursing manuals⁽¹¹⁾, dissertations and theses⁽¹²⁾. The documents have been analyzed in order to seek relevant aspects in the most varied of contexts which reflect the study object⁽⁶⁾.

Documentary analysis, as a result, is proposed as a means of producing or re-elaborating knowledges, and of creating new ways of understanding phenomena, interpreting facts, summarizing information, determining tendencies and – as far as possible – making inferences⁽³⁾. This justifies the use of this type of research for producing new knowledge in social studies, including in nursing. However, in spite of this methodology's recognized contribution, there is a paucity of information available on its use in scientific productions⁽⁴⁾.

Considering the importance of discerning the difference between research method and technique of analysis in studies which use documentary analysis, as well as the contribution of its promotion as a methodological path for research in nursing, this study aims to characterize the use of documentary analysis in theses defended in the Postgraduate Programs in Nursing in Brazil.

● METHOD

A bibliometric study, whose technique covers literature, selection, the recording and filing of the topics of interest for research, has the aim of investigating the scientific contributions which are effected on specified issues. Its approach is quantitative, and it aims to describe the behavior and development of the scientific production on a specified area of knowledge⁽¹³⁻¹⁴⁾.

This bibliometrics was based on Lotka's Law, which aims to define scientists' productivity, considering that a small number of authors is responsible for producing a large proportion of the scientific literature; and on Zipf's Law, which defines the representativity that a word has in the scientific context, through the frequency with which it appears – with the words used most indicating the main topic of the text⁽¹³⁻¹⁴⁾.

The study outline was elaborated through a research protocol, validated by an expert reviewer, guiding the data collection and interpretation, and presentation of the results. It included theses defended in Brazilian universities, which were available on the Theses Database of the Coordination for Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES) and on the Sucupira Platform, which used documentary analysis as a research method or data collection technique, and which presented the following descriptors: pesquisa (research), documento (document) and enfermagem (nursing). The present study excluded theses not available in full, or which were not defended on the Postgraduate Programs in Nursing.

It is emphasized that until 2012, the theses were made available on the CAPES Database. From 2013 onward, a new research platform was made available – the Sucupira Platform. The aim of this new tool was to improve the services made available in the portal, strengthening the relation between academics and the higher education institutions⁽¹⁵⁾.

To obtain the data, the researchers consulted the databases in January 2017. The time period for selection of theses was not defined. The search was refined as follows: by the area of knowledge: nursing; level of course: doctorate. A total of 364 theses were found in the CAPES database, with a further 99 in the Sucupira Platform. After reading the abstracts, and applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 19 were selected from the first database, and 76 from the second; making a total of 95 theses, which were read in full for annotation and extraction of topics of interest.

The documents were analyzed in February – June 2017. The theses selected were organized in a Microsoft Excel® spreadsheet, with the following items: Higher Education Institute where the theses were defended; title, authors, year and researcher-supervisor; theoretical framework used; type and nature of the study; type of document analyzed, complementary techniques/methods used and use of documentary analysis. Finally, the researchers analyzed the data and undertook the interpretation, summarizing and discussing the results, with the result emerging of the use of documentary analysis in theses defended in the Postgraduate Programs in Nursing in Brazil.

● RESULTS

The results showed that of the 19 theses available in the CAPES database, eight (8.42%) were from 2011, and 11 (11.58%) from 2012. Of the 76 theses analyzed from the Platform, 18 (18.95%) were from 2013, 22 (23.16%) from 2014, 18 (18.95%) from 2015 and 18 (18.95%) from 2016. Considering the two databases, a total of 95 theses was included in the study.

Regarding the type of study, 31 (32.63%) theses used case studies, 25 (26.31%) were exploratory-descriptive, and 14 (14.74%) used documentary research, corresponding to 73.68% of the theses analyzed, as presented in Figure 1.



Figure 1 - Distribution of the theses according to type of research*, period 2011 – 2016. Florianópolis, SC, Brazil, 2017

*Some theses associated with more than one type of research.

**Eighteen theses associated documentary analysis with only one type of research: methodological, evaluative, integrative review, thematic analysis, epidemiological, methodological research, exploratory-comprehensive, intervention study, experimental, participative research, evaluability study, sociodemographic, ecological, descriptive-comparative, descriptive, categorical, dialectical hermeneutic, thematic oral history, sociological-comprehensive – and one thesis did not specify the type of research.

Regarding the study outline, 61 theses (64.21%) had a qualitative approach, while 11 (11.58%) balanced quantitative and qualitative approaches, eight (8.42%) undertook quantitative studies and 15 theses (15.7%) did not present the type of approach used.

Three researchers stood out due to three supervised theses (3.16%) and 11 researchers had two (11.58%) supervised theses. The remainder were responsible for supervising one thesis.

The South and South East regions produced 90.53% (86 theses) of the studies analyzed in this bibliometrics, with the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC) and the University of São Paulo (USP) in Ribeirão Preto being the schools with the highest number of productions using documentary analysis (Figure 2).

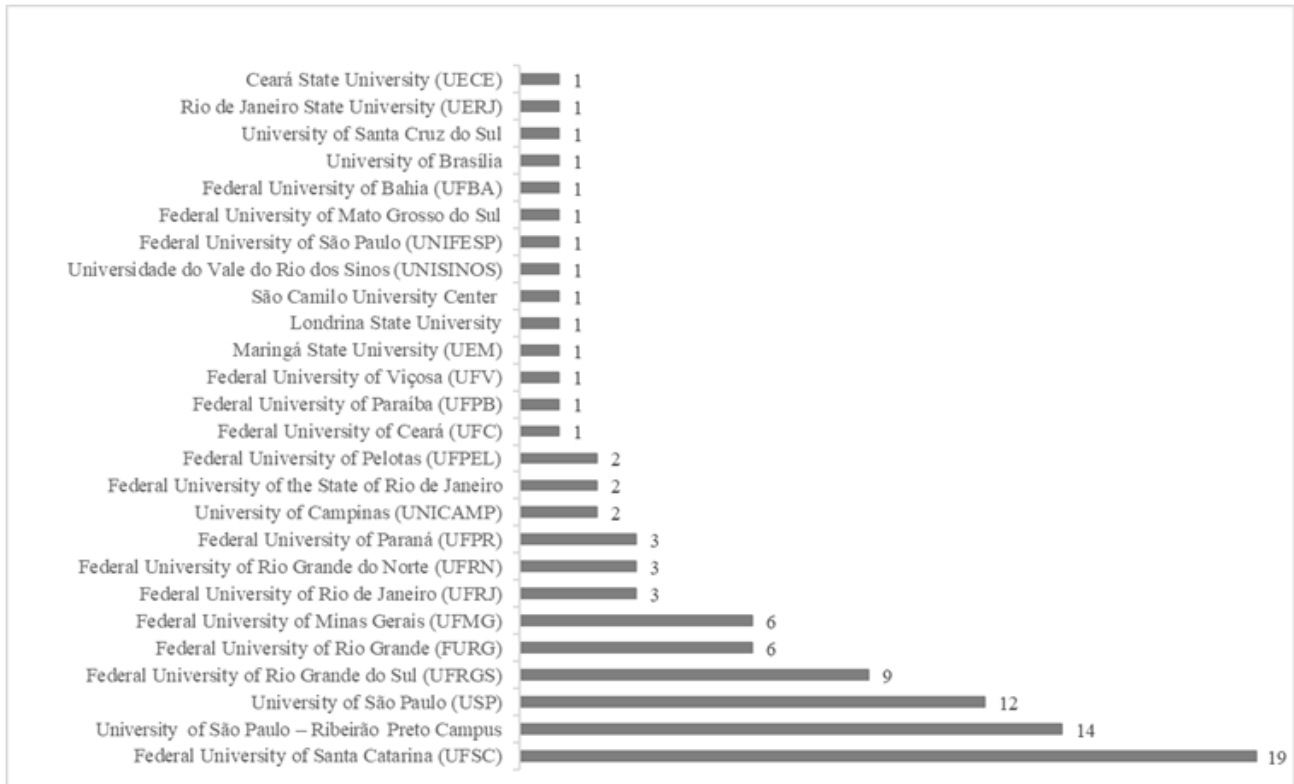


Figure 2 - Distribution of theses by Higher Education Institution, 2011 – 2016 (n=95). Florianópolis, SC, Brazil, 2017

The use of documentary analysis was characterized as a technique for the collection and analysis of data, or as the main research method. Of the 95 theses analyzed, 81 (85.26%) used documentary analysis as the technique for collection and analysis of data, and 14 (14.74%) used it as the main research method. Of the 81 (85.26%) theses that used documentary analysis as the technique, 66 (81.48%) used it as a technique or method complementary to interviews, 24 (29.63%) used nonparticipant observation, 22 (27.16%) used field diaries, 13 (16.05%) used questionnaires, 11 (13.58%) used focus groups, nine (11.11%) used participant observation, and two (2.47%) used documentary analysis.

The following themes were identified: records of weights of healthcare solid waste, series of historical indicators, unique therapeutic project, tests of moral judgment, consultation scripts, dialectical hermeneutic circuits, psychometric evaluation of the Q-DIO instrument; ethnography and study questionnaire were used just once (1.23%) as complementary data collection methods or techniques. Of the 14 (14.74%) theses that used documentary analysis as a research method, 13 (92.86%) did not use any complementary technique or method for data collection, and one (7.14%) used bibliographic research as a complementary technique.

Regarding the documents analyzed in the studies, 20 theses (21.05%) used one type of document, and 75 theses (78.95%) used two or more, as shown in Table 1. Legislation and public health policies n=61 (26.41%) and the institutional documents n=45 (19.48%) were the documents with the highest representativity in the theses analyzed.

Table 1 – Types of documents analyzed in the theses, 2011 – 2016. Florianópolis, SC, Brazil, 2017

| Documents | n (%)* |
|--|------------|
| Legislation and public health policies | 61 (26.41) |
| Institutional documents** | 45 (19.48) |
| Educational documents*** | 36 (15.58) |
| Private documents of the company/institution | 24 (10.39) |
| Theses, dissertations, articles, books, journals | 23 (9.96) |
| Publications of organizations, Professional Councils, Associations**** | 22 (9.52) |
| Patient Medical Records | 14 (6.06) |
| Images | 05 (2.16) |
| Field diary | 01 (0.43) |

* One thesis may have used more than one type of document

**Including municipal health plans, statutes, manuals, data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), the Unified Health System's (SUS) I.T Department (DATASUS), the National Register of Health Establishments (Cadastro Nacional de Estabelecimento de Saúde) (CNES), etc.

***Including pedagogical projects and teaching plans for courses at the technical and undergraduate level in nursing.

****Including publications of the National Association of Private Hospitals (ANAHP), PROQUALIS, Commitment to Hospital Quality (Compromisso com a Qualidade Hospitalar) (CQH), International Organization for Standardization (ISO), The Brazilian Nursing Association (ABEN), the Brazilian National Standards Association (ABNT), etc.

Among the studies selected, 25 (26.32%) used one theoretical framework, and 70 (73.68%) used two or more frameworks. Of the 95 studies, 47 (49.47%) used frameworks from sociology, and 40 (42.11%) used frameworks or theories from the field of nursing. Of the remaining theses, 29 (30.53%) used public health policies, 23 (24.21%) used educational documents, nine (9.47%) used legal frameworks, and six (6.32%) used frameworks relating to patient safety and quality improvement as their theoretical underpinning.

● DISCUSSION

The use of documentary analysis as either the data collection and analysis technique and/or the research method contributes to collecting empirical evidence and to consolidating nursing as a scientific profession. The majority of the theses analyzed undertook qualitative analysis of the data. This methodology contributes to the understanding of the complexities and subjectivities involved in the innumerable factors surrounding investigations in the health area – above all, regarding issues related to behaviors, lifestyle, the health-illness process and social interactions between the subjects⁽⁴⁾. This explains why they are chosen in the documentary studies, which concentrate on the understanding and explanation of the dynamic of the social relations, and which require approaches which are more critical of the object investigated⁽²⁾.

The quantitative approach was used in seven theses. Research of this nature is centered on the objectivity, and considers that the context can be understood based in the analysis of raw data, collected using standardized and neutral instruments⁽¹⁶⁾. This approach in documentary analysis allows one only to identify and quantify the phenomena, but not to understand all of the stages proposed by the method⁽³⁻⁴⁾. The mixed approach was used in eight studies as a means of collecting more information than would be possible using one approach in isolation, as studies of this nature suggest⁽¹⁶⁾.

Considering the prevalence of studies using the case study method, it is highlighted that this allows and encourages the researcher to use a broad approach to a single phenomenon through the use of multiple sources of evidence, including documentary research⁽¹⁷⁾.

The use of documentary analysis in the theses produced by nurses was concentrated in the South and South East regions of Brazil, a result which may be related to the increase in the number of postgraduate courses in Brazil, particularly in these regions, which bring together a large proportion of

the centers of research in nursing⁽¹⁸⁾. As a result, emphasis is placed on the important role of Institutions of Higher Education in the production and development of scientific knowledge⁽¹⁹⁻²⁰⁾.

The majority of studies used documentary analysis as a technique for collecting and analyzing data. It is being used to a much lesser extent as a research method. The studies using it as a technique for collecting and analyzing data integrate data found in various sources, as a means of meeting their objectives. Some forms of information necessary for a study, in general, can only be grasped through consulting and analyzing specific documents, as this information is not available through any other means. Accordingly, documentary analysis is characterized by the analytical treatment of documents, guided by the research problem proposed. In this way, it can be used as a complementary instrument used in association with a separate methodological procedure⁽²¹⁾.

In contrast, studies based on documents as the main material extract from these all of the analysis necessary for understanding the study object, organizing and interpreting them in accordance with their objectives, thus eliminating – at least partly – the possibility of any influence of the set of interactions, occurrences or behaviors researched⁽³⁾. As a result, this methodology includes the set of techniques which make it possible to grasp the context, the researcher's creative potential, and the theoretical concepts of the approach, this being the main way of realizing the study⁽²²⁾. These concepts may be methodological and/or theoretical, offering a point of view to the researcher regarding the analysis of the documents.

In nursing, documentary analysis as a research method has been used with the objective of understanding the normative rationales that define the practice of care. Through the analysis of the resolutions of the Federal Council of Nursing it was possible to systematize the normative principles which guide the nursing team's practice of care, under the supervision of the staff nurse, the specific nursing activities, and the managerial issues involved in the care provided⁽²³⁾.

Using the same method, one study undertaken analyzed the inclusion of the topic of Systematization of Nursing Care (SNC) in the training of nurses. The authors used, as the data source, planning and development notebooks, which contained the teaching and learning plans for an undergraduate course in Nursing⁽²⁴⁾. Another study, which used documentary analysis as the research method, investigated the training of nurses, with a focus on the advances and challenges posed by the Curricular Guidelines for Undergraduate Courses in Nursing (Diretrizes Curriculares do Curso de Graduação em Enfermagem)⁽⁶⁾.

However: one study evidenced gaps to be explored in theses produced by nurses⁽²⁵⁾. Upon analyzing the training of persons with doctorates in nursing in Brazil, the study evidenced, in the nursing theses, a focus of research geared towards responses to demands posed by their practice, related to direct attendance to the patient, emphasizing the paucity of theses produced in the area of nurse management. Accordingly, using theses as a source of documentary evidence for studies in the area of management in nursing could contribute to drive forward this field of knowledge, encouraging the incorporation and discussion of this gap⁽¹²⁾.

In this study, legislation and public policies and institutional and educational documents were used most for the documentary analysis. The use of written documents (textual) as a source for data collection is shown to be important for the studies, in particular in the area of the social sciences, as it represents nearly all of the facts resulting from human activity in specified epochs, without the direct influence of the researcher⁽²⁾. The nursing records made in medical records constitute textual documents used as sources of data in studies. However, the incomplete description of the records on the part of the professional compromises the results⁽¹⁰⁾. As a result, textual documents are not only a set of facts; they also represent the intention of the person who wrote them and the purpose for which they were created^(3,26).

It is highlighted that the sources of research used in documentary analysis can be either primary or secondary. Primary sources include private letters, personal writings, official and internal documents of institutions and companies, and legal texts. Secondary sources encompass printed media, such as journals, bulletins, catalogs and almanacs; there is also electronic media, such as magnetic recordings and videos and sound recordings and digital recordings of audio and images; there are also technical reports⁽¹⁾.

Besides written documents, iconographic documents can also be used as sources of data. They are generally used to illustrate an argument derived from the image itself; that is, the image is a translation of a written discourse which can, furthermore, consider gaps that the textual records did not present. It is necessary, however, for there to be methodological rigor so as to avoid errors, such as using it merely as an illustrative source⁽⁹⁾. The subjectivity of the image, and its reading in a context which is distant from the original one, can lead the researcher to commit errors of interpretation, which causes the study of images to be full of challenges. In this context, emphasis is placed on the importance of understanding that all images possess some reason for existing, and carry symbolic values, communicating and demonstrating meaning, and performing a variety of functions, whether these are religious, political or ideological⁽²⁷⁾.

Furthermore, it is necessary to characterize the form of the access to the documents (physical or electronic). In the studies analyzed in the present study, most of the documents were accessed physically. These generally are from the private domain and require the authorization of the institution and/or author responsible prior to their analysis⁽²⁶⁾. The analysis of documents undertaken through computer systems, on the other hand, can facilitate or hinder the undertaking of the study. It facilitates matters when it allows the researcher to broaden access to the documents in libraries and research centers in various countries; however, through allowing access to indicators and differing versions of the same document, it can sidetrack the researcher's focus, hindering the search for the data⁽¹⁾.

Classifying the documents by type and form of access promotes their selection, through identifying the extent to which a document can contribute to the object of investigation^(3,26). It follows that the text's authenticity, trustworthiness, nature, key concepts and internal logic must be considered prior to selecting a document. This will allow a coherent interpretation for the researcher, ensuring a minimum response to the study object and conferring greater credibility upon the documentary analysis undertaken^(2,26).

In the present study, the majority of studies were based in sociological frameworks for interpreting and analyzing the data – these are commonly used as a basis for research. Such studies require the interpretation and understanding of phenomena and are highly usual in nursing, bearing in mind that human beings and their interactions with the social environment are frequently a study object in this area.

Studies based in nursing frameworks, such as those which use the North American Nursing Diagnosis Association International (NANDA-I) classification system, for example, have sought to gather information for assessing the quality of nursing records in specific, textual documents⁽¹⁰⁾. Because these are specific nomenclature, such classifications possess information which, often, could not be produced by interviews and/or observation in isolation, as the information these produce would not be enough to produce a wide reaching analysis of the study, with documentary research being an alternative form of investigation. In this case, the use of the theoretical framework aims to guide the researcher in the construction of ideas and in the understanding of the topics studied, providing her with elements for forming a basis for the study, and corresponding to its theoretical-methodological premises.

The fact that this study analyzed only theses produced in the field of nursing – not covering dissertations and articles from the area – is considered a limitation. However, considering the theses' strong level of evidence and scientific rigor, the present study indicates documentary analysis as an alternative technique of data collection and analysis, and is a method which is consistent for research in nursing.

● CONCLUSION

This study provides knowledge of the use of documentary analysis in theses defended in Postgraduate Programs in Nursing in Brazil. The results evidence its greater use as a data collection technique than as a research method. As the technique for analyzing and collecting data, it is used in order to complement data deriving from other collection techniques, such as interviews, nonparticipant observation, and field diaries, in order to strengthen investigations' findings. As a research method, documents were used as data sources, describing the methodological route for the access, selection,

consultation and analysis of the information extracted.

There are few studies in research in nursing in Brazil which explore the analysis of documents in depth, given documentary analysis's contribution to a consistent methodological path. Its use as a method and technique for data collection and analysis allows greater theoretical depth and the formulation of empirical evidence, through analyzing the information contained in documents elaborated and used by nurses in their care and managerial practice, thus strengthening this as a profession.

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