LUMEN ET VIRTUS

Absenteeism and dropout in nursing: Improvement strategies aimed at higher education

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ABSTRACT

Absenteeism and dropout in nursing are phenomena that affect the quality and efficiency of health services, as well as the training and satisfaction of students and professionals in the area. Thus, this article undertakes to analyze the causes and consequences of both ills – recurrent during graduation – in addition to proposing ways of improvement aimed at higher education. Therefore, this paper aims to solve these obstacles by fostering the evolution of nursing as a category. To this end, an integrative review of scientific journals – published in the last 10 years – that addressed the topic from different theoretical and methodological perspectives was carried out. The results indicated that both absenteeism and dropout during the nursing course are related to individual, organizational and social factors that interfere with the health, productivity and well-being of the entire academic body. Among these coefficients, the lack of recognition, work overload, stress, low remuneration, dissatisfaction, lack of support and guidance, curricular inadequacy and difficulty in entering the labor market stand out, in detail. It is precisely in this scenario that the current research suggests some strategic proposals for polishing higher education in nursing, such as: the revision and updating of curricula, the adoption of active teaching-learning methodologies, the valorization and training of professors, the promotion of the health of students and employees, the integration between theory and practice, the articulation between academia and the world of work and, in particular, the expansion of employment and career opportunities. Therefore, the article concludes that these

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proposals would be able to contribute to the mitigation of the problems diagnosed – and also to the progress of educational excellence in nursing, as well as health care.

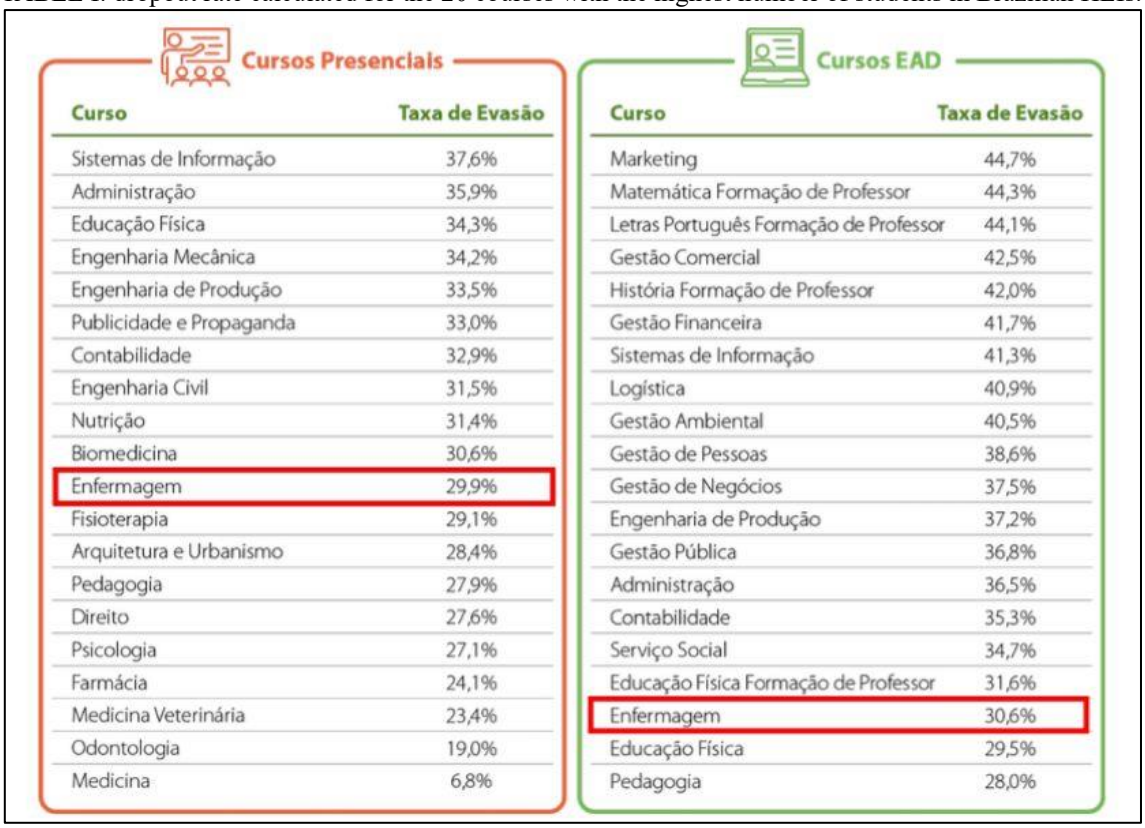
Keywords: Nursing, Absenteeism, Dropout, Challenges, Education, Health.

INTRODUCTION

Nursing is an area of health that requires a high level of qualification and commitment. However, the rate of absenteeism and dropout in undergraduate courses is a problem that has been worrying Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

According to Rodrigues et al. (2020), absenteeism is defined as the absence of the student from classes, extracurricular activities or internships – without justification. Dropout, on the other hand, is the student's withdrawal from the course before completion.

TABLE I: dropout rate calculated for the 20 courses with the highest number of students in Brazilian HEIs.



Cursos Presenciais	
Curso	**Taxa de Evasão**
Sistemas de Informação	37,6%
Administração	35,9%
Educação Física	34,3%
Engenharia Mecânica	34,2%
Engenharia de Produção	33,5%
Publicidade e Propaganda	33,0%
Contabilidade	32,9%
Engenharia Civil	31,5%
Nutrição	31,4%
Biomedicina	30,6%
Enfermagem	29,9%
Fisioterapia	29,1%
Arquitetura e Urbanismo	28,4%
Pedagogia	27,9%
Direito	27,6%
Psicologia	27,1%
Farmácia	24,1%
Medicina Veterinária	23,4%
Odontologia	19,0%
Medicina	6,8%

Cursos EAD	
Curso	**Taxa de Evasão**
Marketing	44,7%
Matemática Formação de Professor	44,3%
Letras Português Formação de Professor	44,1%
Gestão Comercial	42,5%
História Formação de Professor	42,0%
Gestão Financeira	41,7%
Sistemas de Informação	41,3%
Logística	40,9%
Gestão Ambiental	40,5%
Gestão de Pessoas	38,6%
Gestão de Negócios	37,5%
Engenharia de Produção	37,2%
Gestão Pública	36,8%
Administração	36,5%
Contabilidade	35,3%
Serviço Social	34,7%
Educação Física Formação de Professor	31,6%
Enfermagem	30,6%
Educação Física	29,5%
Pedagogia	28,0%

SOURCE: Institute Secretariat of Specialized Modalities of Education (SEMESP) – adapted, 2019.

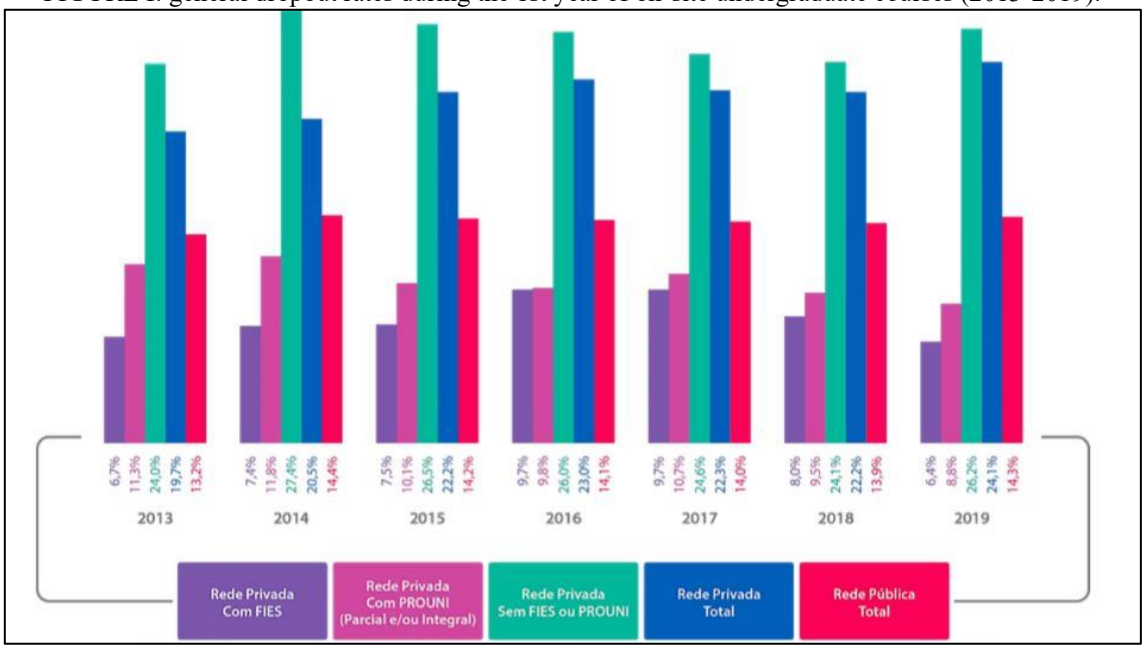
The authors point out, in short, that these two ills can have several reasons, such as:

- Personal factors: financial, health or family setbacks;
- Academic factors: learning difficulties, lack of motivation or incompatibility between the course load and work;
- Institutional factors: lack of infrastructure or psychopedagogical support, as well as anachronistic teaching models that are distant from the student reality.

According to Santos et al. (2022), the consequences of these problems are critical. For HEIs, they can lead to reduced or lost revenue, loss of credibility, and difficulty in training qualified professionals. For students, they can result in delays in training, reduced employment opportunities

and even abandonment of the profession.

FIGURE I: general dropout rates during the 1st year of on-site undergraduate courses (2013-2019).



SOURCE: SEMESP Institute, 2019.

Although, percentages and comparisons, such data seem negligible for nursing, in absolute terms they are worrying, as they represent a waste of resources, in addition to compromising the quality of health care. Therefore, the development of improvement methodologies is, notoriously, an urgent challenge that requires the contribution of all actors involved in the process of training the future professional. It is precisely in this context that it is noted: both dropout and absenteeism, even during training, are relevant problems for higher education – and even for the community as a whole. Now: nursing is a field of knowledge that requires a high level of commitment. Therefore, the mitigation of the aforementioned barriers is essential to ensure the quality of the instruction provided. And, likewise, to adequately meet the needs of the population to be assisted – whose demand is very high.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Lusitanian poet Fernando Pessoa stated in his work "Book of Disquiet" (1934) that the world belongs to those who do not feel; […] The essential condition for being a practical man is the absence of sensitivity. However, nursing, as an art-science of care – and characteristically generous in humanity – slowly goes against the tide, resisting to be desensitized to pain. In this sense, even during training, it would not be acceptable for any citizen to be left behind in this race.

Consequently, career absenteeism, a poignant drama that we have discussed at length and that affects the quality of support provided to patients, the health of the nurses being educated, and the value of health services, is defined as unscheduled absence from the place of study for various

reasons. We reiterate here: such as illnesses, accidents, leaves, absences and delays (Barboza et al., 2010). Such recurrent absences can lead to work overload, stress, dissatisfaction, demotivation and low performance of those involved, compromising the care process and the performance of all members of the nursing team (Bacan; Martins; Santos, 2020).

TABLE III – NOTE: the most common reason for unjustified absences is dissatisfaction with studies, followed by health problems and lack of opportunities for professional development.

TIPOS DE ABSENTEÍSMO	FREQUÊNCIA RELATIVA (%)
Justificado	80%
Injustificado	20%
TOTAL: 100%	

SOURCE: Federal Nursing Council (COFEN) – adapted, 2022.

On the other hand, dropout in this field, in turn, is another adjacent phenomenon that worries higher education institutions, as it represents the withdrawal of nursing students from completing the undergraduate course. These hardships are deleterious, namely, for the student, who does not complete his professional training – and, nevertheless, for the institution, which does not achieve the objectives that were imbued with them. In this sense, the community itself is harmed by not having properly qualified professionals to meet its needs in terms of health and also by the deficit of personnel (Silva; P; Borenstein, 2008).

TALKING ABOUT GENDER

Nursing is a profession founded and historically marked by female protagonism – however, it is not uncommon to still be seen nowadays as an activity that involves hierarchical submission and reduced autonomy (facts linked to social roles attributed to women over time). Such a panorama generates negative stereotypes and the erroneous devaluation of the category, restricting the possibilities of dignified performance and recognition of nurses. In addition, women may face considerable difficulties in reconciling studies and work, experience incompatibilities between college and the institution of marriage or family responsibilities (care dedicated to relatives, the elderly, minors, the debilitated and the home itself). Other issues under debate are the greater female susceptibility to instability or financial dependence on others, as well as monthly painful menstrual cramps, possible pregnancies or misunderstandings related to the climacteric (Monteiro et al., 2021). Thus, suffering greater burden and biopsychosocial stress that can even compromise their health, absenteeism and dropout become more frequent among them.

PERCEPTIONS OF TIME

Something to note, too, is that younger nursing students may have less life experience or more insecurities when dealing with the multiple challenges of graduation as a normative process.

Being still closely linked to the universe of the family group of origin (relatives, friends, neighbors) and to the dilemmas of recent adulthood, they may present difficulties in social adaptation to the new (academic) environment – which make it difficult to create stable bonds, as well as to remain there.

On the other hand, it is essential to also deal with ageism – the other side of the coin that presents itself as a form of discrimination based on age (Goldani, 2010). This phenomenon can induce veiled prejudices with different age groups, leading to unrealistic expectations about academic performance. For example, younger nursing students may be seen as immature by their superiors, with underestimation of performance. And, from this point of view, as on a two-way street, ageism can also negatively affect the motivation of the elderly, leading to a lack of understanding on the part of colleagues and the community itself – which, in general, do not see the university as "the natural place" of the most advanced in years. Nevertheless, the literature suggests that age group may be a relevant coefficient of dropout, with older students having a greater propensity to drop out of the course due to lack of adequate multidisciplinary support.

DEALING WITH DISABILITIES AND ABLEISM

Nursing undergraduates can experience these phenomena in different ways, both as victims and as agents. In the first case, they suffer stigma for having a disability – or social exclusion for choosing a profession that takes care of citizens with special needs (supposedly seen as "weak" or "undesirable"). As agents, the students of the course can, negatively, reproduce inhumane behaviors against the carriers with whom they live – either due to lack of information, sensitivity or empathy. How do we deal with differences? In this sense, the author Paulo Freire (1987) stated: "when education is not liberating, the dream of the oppressed is to be an oppressor".

In other words, the aforementioned ills expand the list of contributions to absenteeism and dropout in the university environment in two central ways: by external rejection or self-rejection. One occurs when disabled students are the target of prejudice, insensitivity or indifference from their colleagues, tutors, employees of the institution or patients due to their clinical condition – or even professional choice. Self-rejection, on the other hand, occurs when the students themselves begin to introject the feeling of inferiority, judging themselves guilty or even worthy of shame due to their disability or field of activity. Always emphasizing that, particularly with regard to psychic illnesses, there are still great social taboos to be debated, since diseases in this field are not always apparent, despite their complexity (Silva; Oliveira, 2010).

To combat such forms of exclusion, it is necessary to promote inclusive education that respects and values the diversity and uniqueness of each person. It is also essential to make the academic nursing community aware of the analogous obstacle of ableism: intolerance against people with disabilities by considering them inferior or incapable of full and integrated participation in life

in society (Gomes, 2019). This can present itself in different ways – from paternalistic attitudes (which suppose that patients need, excessively, constant help), to jokes, offenses or aggressions that humiliate them, putting them in situations of risk (Brasil, 2008, p. 15). Ableism greatly denies the citizenship and dignity of this public by unevenly emphasizing its limitations – and not its potentialities (Freire, 1987).

Therefore, it is essential that, especially, nursing students are sensitized to deal with such scenarios in an ethical, empathetic and respectful way, recognizing their rights – and those of others, needs, aptitudes and talents. In addition, it is urgent that students with disabilities themselves be welcomed and supported in the university environment through accessibility resources and opportunities for personal or professional development. It is in this way that an education is created that can contribute, in fact, to the construction of a more just, liberating and inclusive society, instigating the appreciation of human diversity in all its dimensions.

COMMUNICATION AND SYNERGY

Both absenteeism and dropout can be promoted by the dissatisfaction, frustration and disenchantment that less favored groups in terms of empowerment feel in relation to the course. This also occurs due to unpleasant feedback with the faculty after continuous – and inefficient – attempts at dialogue and permanence in the university course. In fact, research shows that students who get low grades or have already continuously failed courses are more likely to miss more and give up on nursing graduation due to the feeling of disadvantage in relation to their peers (Barboza et al., 2017). Thus, they may feel less confident in their own academic abilities (often undermined by poor infrastructure) – and even disdain the institution they are in.

INSTITUTIONAL AND PSYCHOPEDAGOGICAL SUPPORT IN FLOW CONTROL

It is a way for higher education institutions to offer support to nursing students – both academically and social-emotionally – to prevent and reduce absenteeism and dropout. This reinforcement involves actions such as: the adequate dimensioning of the teaching and technical-administrative staff, the provision of adequate didactic and laboratory resources, the offer of scholarships and financial aid, the carrying out of professional guidance and curricular integration activities, the implementation of monitoring and pedagogical evaluation programs, the creation of spaces for listening and psychological support, the articulation with the community-health services, among others (Silva; Lee; Soares, 2012).

The above initiatives can have a very positive impact on facing the challenges that generate absenteeism and dropout among future nurses, such as those already listed: learning difficulties, dissatisfaction with the course, lack of motivation, diseases, interpersonal conflicts and

socioeconomic problems. In addition, these actions can favor the development of skills necessary for the good professional performance of undergraduates, such as: critical reasoning, problem solving, and leadership (Barboza et al., 2017).

IDIOSYNCRASIES AND WHAT UNITES US

According to Silva, Santos, and Oliveira (2023), singularities can be both an obstacle and a beneficial resource for labor development – depending on how they are managed and valued. Nevertheless, Ferreira, Lima, and Gonçalves (2023) highlight that there are common elements in this environment that, despite the divergences, have the ability to perennially connect the nursing staff – such as vocation, solidarity, and a sense of commitment to health as an area of knowledge. This is precisely the modus operandi to be stimulated in higher education institutions.

In conclusion, here it is suggested that it is necessary to recognize and respect the differences of the constituents of this sector, without losing sight, however, of what motivates and reconciles them. It is also necessary to invest in pedagogical improvement methods that promote the satisfaction, integration, exercise of citizenship and permanence of nurses in the labor market they will face. In this way, it is expected to reduce the rates of absenteeism and dropout, thus contributing to the improvement of the quality of health care.

METHODOLOGY

TYPE OF STUDY

This is an integrative review study that aims to address the phenomena of absenteeism and dropout during undergraduate nursing in Brazil, and also proposes solutions for such occurrences. Research of this kind seeks to elucidate the guiding question of the study involving, above all, the relevant materials described in journals, books, dissertations, theses and other documents.

According to Souza, Silva and Carvalho (2010, p. 102) "integrative review is a method that provides the synthesis of knowledge and the incorporation of the applicability of results of significant studies in practice". Thus, the bibliographic survey follows the following steps: definition of the guiding question, sampling or search in the literature, categorization of studies, evaluation of the included articles, interpretation of the results and presentation of the review.

The present research complied with the ethical criteria of research with human beings.

DATA COLLECTION AND PROCESSING PROCEDURES

The search engines Scientific Electronic Library Online (Scielo), Latin American and Caribbean Literature in Health Sciences (LILACS), Virtual Health Library (VHL), and Google

Scholar were used for consultation. We also included sources such as university records and research with nursing students described in articles (information about the students' institutional experiences).

We also use government data on the labor market in this area and information linked to the Ministry of Education. And, for review purposes, the present study considered the publications contained in the interval between 2004-2024.

Numerical data were treated with descriptive statistics (Vieira, 2016)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The private network is composed of institutions that charge fiduciary fees to students, while the public network consists of entities that offer free places in educational institutions – with the exception of maintaining these by taxes from the taxpayer to the State. In the latter, admission is generally made through more competitive selection processes (both for the financial exemption and for the reputation they still carry). The general panorama of the public and private sectors with the comparative degree of the respective enrollments is shown in figures II and III.



FIGURA II: número de instituições de ensino superior no Brasil.
FONTE: SEMESP, 2021.

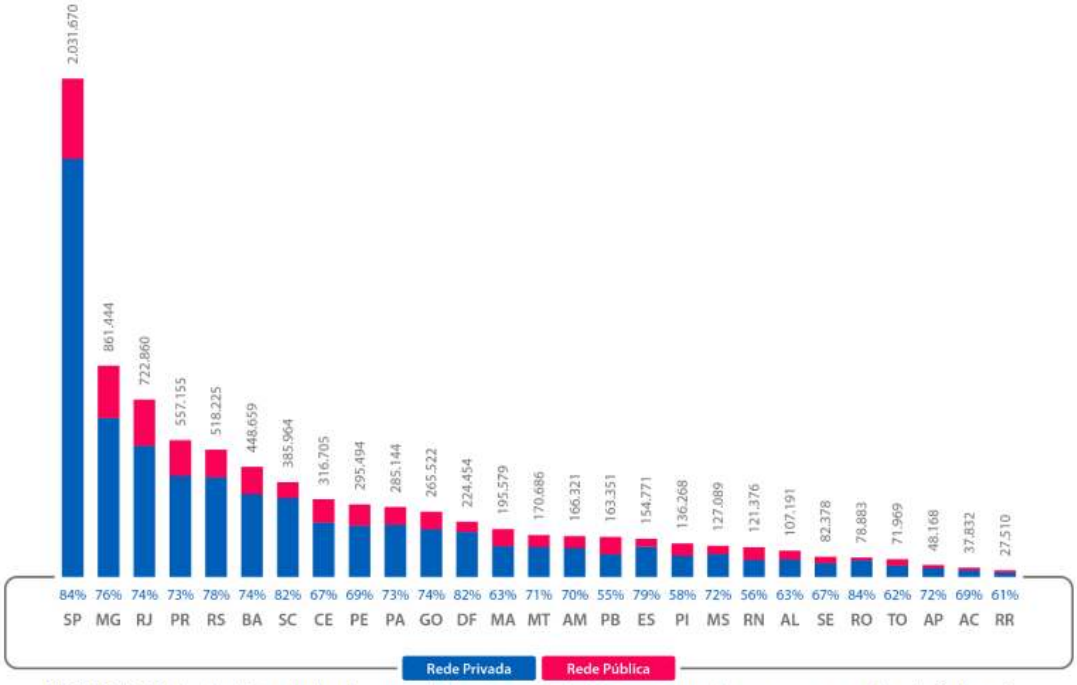


FIGURA III: instituições (privadas ou públicas) e matrículas: comparativo entre os estados da federação.
FONTE: Instituto SEMESP, 2021.

We emphasize that the large area of the course chosen from the respective sectors as shown in figure IV. Where the option for the private or public sector can affect the profile, performance and motivation of nursing students, which varies according to social class, school origin, age, gender, etc. In general, students from the private school system tend to be older, from lower classes, from public schools and women, while those from the public school system tend to be younger, from higher classes, from private schools and of both sexes (Oliveira; Ferreira, 2019). We ratify that nursing students from the public school system usually present more promising and evident academic results, higher completion rate and lower dropout rate than those from the private network.

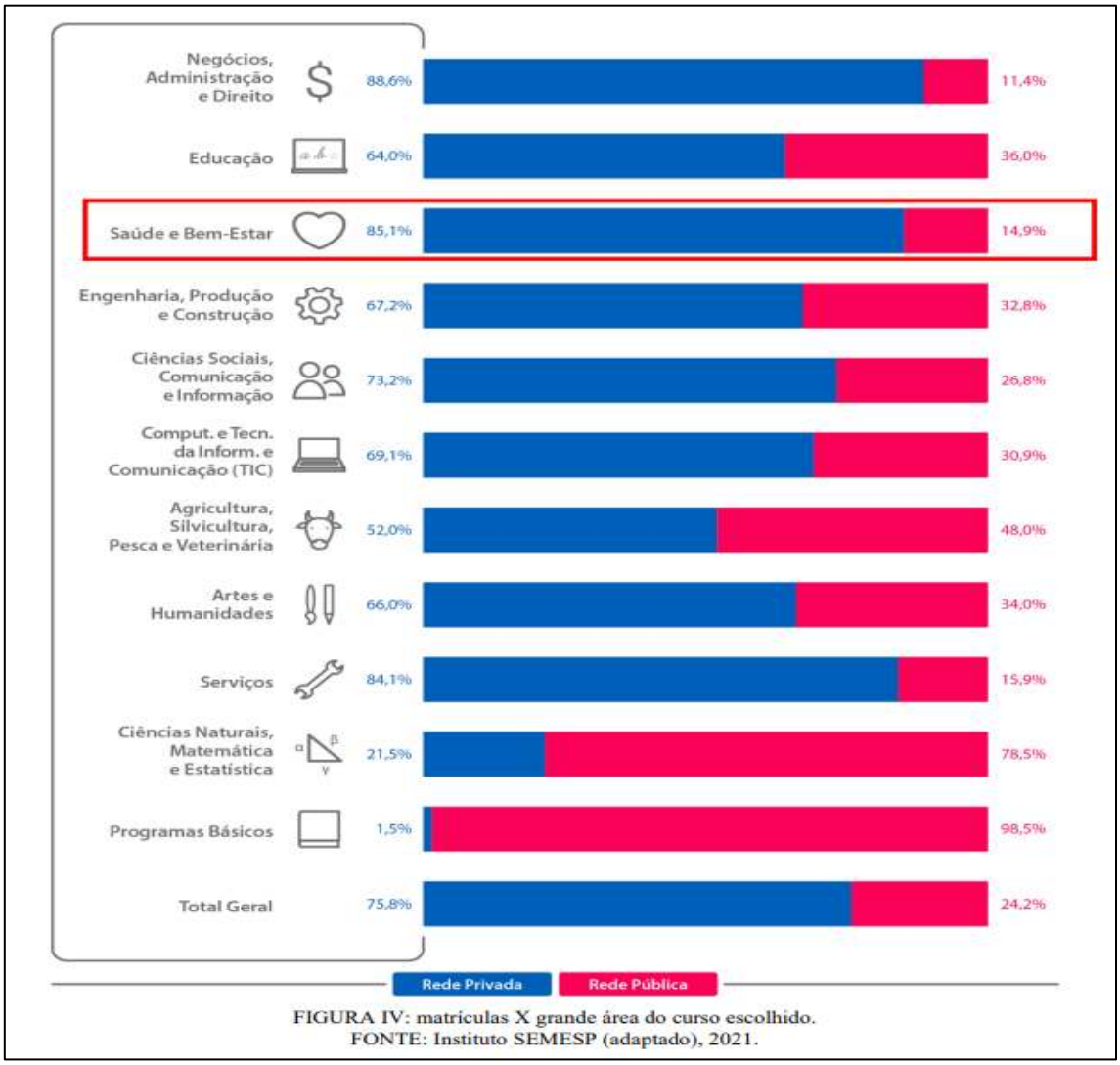


FIGURA IV: matrículas X grande área do curso escolhido.
FONTE: Instituto SEMESP (adaptado), 2021.

The Brazilian state prevails in basic areas – such as natural sciences, environmental sciences and mathematics – almost tying in the area of arts and humanities with the private sector. However, most of the other fields of knowledge – such as law, the service sector, information, and well-being – are dominated by large education holdings (Brasil, 2021). In this bias, the entry of the less favored – economically or those who suffer in terms of ethnic minorities – changed with the still recent Law No. 12,711, of August 29, 2012 – also known as the Quota Law (Brasil, 2012), updated in 2023. However, this alone still does not necessarily guarantee the graduation of this most vulnerable public during the steep years of the course (Silva; Santos, 2020). Nevertheless, the large discrepancy between the number of state and private institutions in the country leads us to consider, logically: if in 2022 we had the 13th highest tax burden among the members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), why do we not obtain consistent results with such disbursement? Who would the public thing work for here, without accessibility? Would the fundamental rights of the Federal Constitution be auctioned (Oliveira; Ferreira, 2019) or is there just misuse of the treasury combined with successive improbable managements? Figure V shows the dropout rate in Brazilian higher education in the public and private networks. In tables IV we have

the nursing course among the most sought after courses in the face-to-face and distance learning modality in the country.

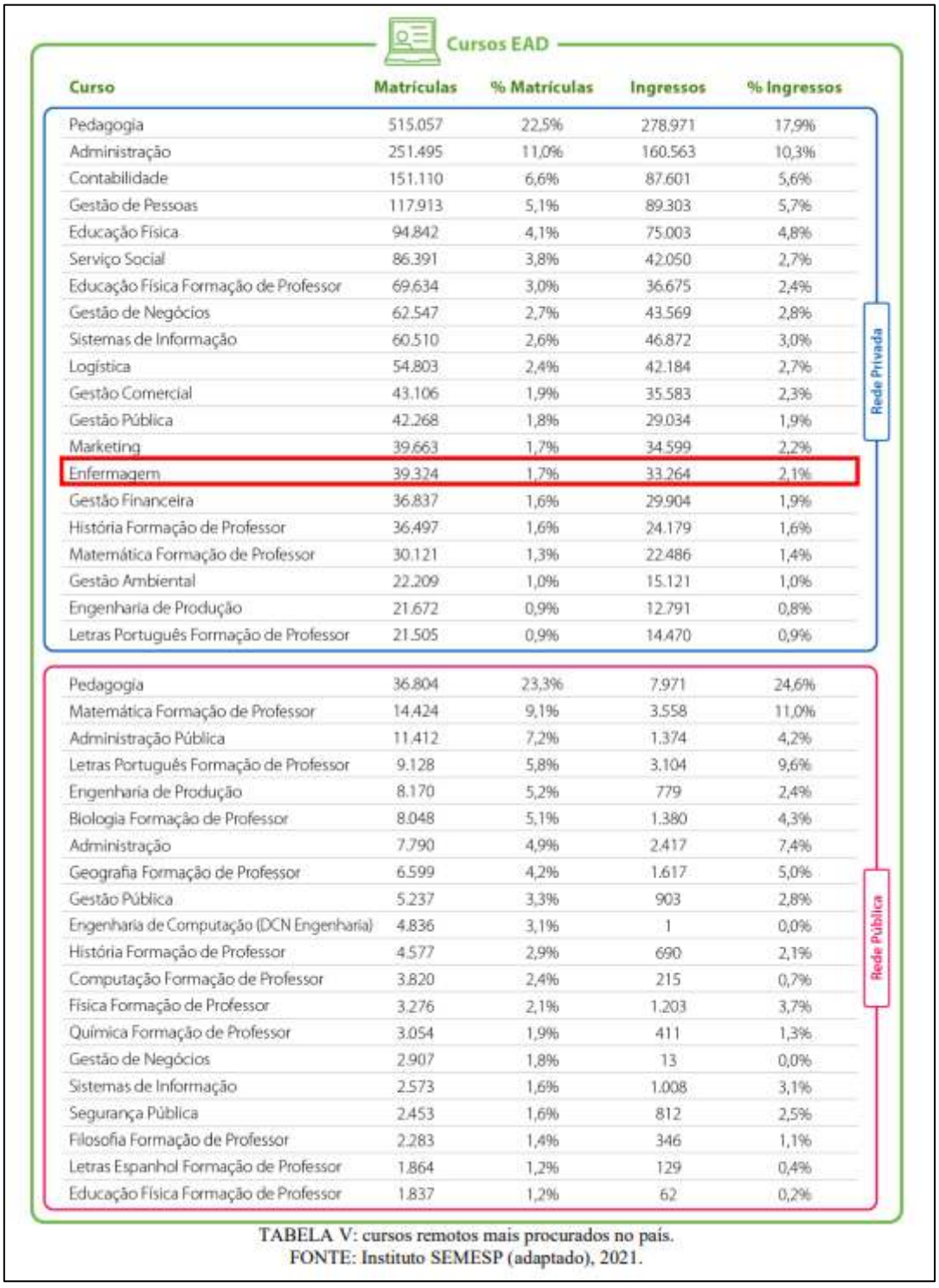


FIGURA V: taxa geral de evasão no ensino superior brasileiro.
FONTE: Instituto SEMESP, 2021.

Cursos Presenciais

Curso	Matrículas	% Matrículas	Ingressos	% Ingressos	
Direito	744.030	17,6%	235.490	15,5%	Rede Privada
Administração	309.643	7,3%	114.641	7,6%	
Enfermagem	251.450	5,9%	96.247	6,4%	
Psicologia	242.595	5,7%	93.110	6,1%	
Engenharia Civil	204.069	4,8%	45.167	3,0%	
Pedagogia	171.289	4,0%	67.851	4,5%	
Contabilidade	162.835	3,8%	56.371	3,7%	
Fisioterapia	155.696	3,7%	54.880	3,6%	
Medicina	125.712	3,0%	34.184	2,3%	
Arquitetura e Urbanismo	124.085	2,9%	31.497	2,1%	
Odontologia	109.931	2,6%	38.122	2,5%	
Educação Física	108.974	2,6%	47.113	3,1%	
Farmácia	108.788	2,6%	37.598	2,5%	
Nutrição	105.834	2,5%	38.762	2,6%	
Medicina Veterinária	84.982	2,0%	31.178	2,1%	
Engenharia de Produção	82.783	2,0%	20.927	1,4%	
Engenharia Mecânica	80.844	1,9%	24.538	1,6%	
Sistemas de Informação	72.969	1,7%	35.392	2,3%	
Biomedicina	69.052	1,6%	31.719	2,1%	
Publicidade e Propaganda	62.792	1,5%	20.854	1,4%	
Pedagogia	92.809	4,8%	23.285	4,4%	Rede Pública
Direito	87.274	4,5%	19.377	3,7%	
Administração	76.849	4,0%	20.382	3,9%	
Medicina	61.998	3,2%	11.949	2,3%	
Agronomia	53.169	2,8%	12.907	2,4%	
Engenharia Civil	51.589	2,7%	11.308	2,1%	
Biologia Formação de Professor	49.061	2,6%	12.743	2,4%	
Sistemas de Informação	48.814	2,5%	17.929	3,4%	
Matemática Formação de Professor	46.221	2,4%	14.867	2,8%	
Contabilidade	43.270	2,3%	10.749	2,0%	
Letras Português Formação de Professor	42.093	2,2%	9.727	1,8%	
História Formação de Professor	36.287	1,9%	9.530	1,8%	
Enfermagem	35.976	1,9%	8.938	1,7%	
Engenharia Mecânica	34.796	1,8%	7.660	1,5%	
Engenharia Elétrica	34.605	1,8%	8.137	1,5%	
Economia	30.460	1,6%	8.441	1,6%	
Educação Física Formação de Professor	30.458	1,6%	7.562	1,4%	
Geografia Formação de Professor	30.454	1,6%	7.963	1,5%	
Química Formação de Professor	29.422	1,5%	9.648	1,8%	
Ciência da Computação	28.886	1,5%	8.255	1,6%	

TABELA IV: cursos presenciais mais procurados no Brasil.
FONTE: Instituto SEMESP (adaptado), 2021.



Cursos EAD

Curso	Matrículas	% Matrículas	Ingressos	% Ingressos	
Pedagogia	515.057	22,5%	278.971	17,9%	Rede Privada
Administração	251.495	11,0%	160.563	10,3%	
Contabilidade	151.110	6,6%	87.601	5,6%	
Gestão de Pessoas	117.913	5,1%	89.303	5,7%	
Educação Física	94.842	4,1%	75.003	4,8%	
Serviço Social	86.391	3,8%	42.050	2,7%	
Educação Física Formação de Professor	69.634	3,0%	36.675	2,4%	
Gestão de Negócios	62.547	2,7%	43.569	2,8%	
Sistemas de Informação	60.510	2,6%	46.872	3,0%	
Logística	54.803	2,4%	42.184	2,7%	
Gestão Comercial	43.106	1,9%	35.583	2,3%	
Gestão Pública	42.268	1,8%	29.034	1,9%	
Marketing	39.663	1,7%	34.599	2,2%	
Enfermagem	39.324	1,7%	33.264	2,1%	
Gestão Financeira	36.837	1,6%	29.904	1,9%	
História Formação de Professor	36.497	1,6%	24.179	1,6%	
Matemática Formação de Professor	30.121	1,3%	22.486	1,4%	
Gestão Ambiental	22.209	1,0%	15.121	1,0%	
Engenharia de Produção	21.672	0,9%	12.791	0,8%	
Letras Português Formação de Professor	21.505	0,9%	14.470	0,9%	
Pedagogia	36.804	23,3%	7.971	24,6%	Rede Pública
Matemática Formação de Professor	14.424	9,1%	3.558	11,0%	
Administração Pública	11.412	7,2%	1.374	4,2%	
Letras Português Formação de Professor	9.128	5,8%	3.104	9,6%	
Engenharia de Produção	8.170	5,2%	779	2,4%	
Biologia Formação de Professor	8.048	5,1%	1.380	4,3%	
Administração	7.790	4,9%	2.417	7,4%	
Geografia Formação de Professor	6.599	4,2%	1.617	5,0%	
Gestão Pública	5.237	3,3%	903	2,8%	
Engenharia de Computação (DCN Engenharia)	4.836	3,1%	1	0,0%	
História Formação de Professor	4.577	2,9%	690	2,1%	
Computação Formação de Professor	3.820	2,4%	215	0,7%	
Física Formação de Professor	3.276	2,1%	1.203	3,7%	
Química Formação de Professor	3.054	1,9%	411	1,3%	
Gestão de Negócios	2.907	1,8%	13	0,0%	
Sistemas de Informação	2.573	1,6%	1.008	3,1%	
Segurança Pública	2.453	1,6%	812	2,5%	
Filosofia Formação de Professor	2.283	1,4%	346	1,1%	
Letras Espanhol Formação de Professor	1.864	1,2%	129	0,4%	
Educação Física Formação de Professor	1.837	1,2%	62	0,2%	

TABELA V: cursos remotos mais procurados no país.
FONTE: Instituto SEMESP (adaptado), 2021.

Currently, and despite the debates, there are three possible teaching modalities for the nursing course: face-to-face, blended (or flexible) and distance learning. Each of them has good and bad sides that should be considered, sparingly, when choosing one of them. Otherwise, let's see: The face-to-face modality is the most traditional, well-regarded and consists of attending classes on the university campus with the presence and guidance of professors and classmates. Its advantages are greater social interaction and contact with the professional reality, more access to laboratory resources, direct supervision of professors, greater development of technical and behavioral skills, as

well as greater identification and commitment to nursing as a profession (Silva, 2023). The disadvantages are higher financial cost and requirement of available time, possible setbacks in physical commuting, greater curricular and schedule rigidity (sometimes permeated by anachronisms), vulnerability to environmental and organizational factors that, in short, can generate a lot of stress, dissatisfaction, illness and absenteeism among all members of the environment (Santos; Ferreira, 2023). The blended or flex modality, in turn, is a combination of face-to-face and remote in which part of the theoretical classes is held online (through a virtual platform) and part of the practical classes and internships are held in person, in laboratories and field activities. The positive sides were greater autonomy of time and space, expansion of the use of recent educational technologies and diversity of information sources, more possibilities in reconciling work and study, also remembering the lower financial cost (Oliveira, 2023). There is, however, less social interaction and eventual contact with the professional reality, high responsibility of students for their own learning, less supervision by teachers, lower development of technical and behavioral skills, in addition to reduced commitment to the profession, as pointed out by studies (Gonçalves et al., 2023).

Finally, we have the distance learning modality – the most recent. It takes place through remote theoretical and practical classes through a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), with the support of distance tutors and digital teaching materials. In terms of advantages and disadvantages, it is quite similar to the previous method, but with an even higher risk of dropout according to educational statistics. Although in Brazil this resource is growing rapidly, a strong movement of nursing as a category is peremptorily positioned against the remote teaching of the profession. The arguments state that the need for face-to-face practices with patients and the need to live with the entire structure that surrounds the health networks – for the purposes of technical qualification – would make distance learning unfeasible. According to entities such as COFEN (2020) and the Ministry of Education (Brasil, 2023), distance would compromise the quality of the care provided and even the biosafety of those involved in the care process. The social class or income of the students can have a salutary influence on whether or not they drop out of the course, affecting access, performance and motivation to complete the nursing degree. Entry can be hampered by the economic and cultural barriers that the lower classes face to enter higher education (Silva, 2023).

The percentage of students enrolled in higher education, related to social class, as shown in figure VI. Performance can be impaired by the material and psychosocial conditions experienced, such as vulnerability to the lack of didactic and human resources, the need to work for subsistence, affective abandonment, the presence of violence, noise or environmental pollution in dangerous territories, manifestations of bullying at the university, as well as discrimination (Santos; Ferreira, 2023).

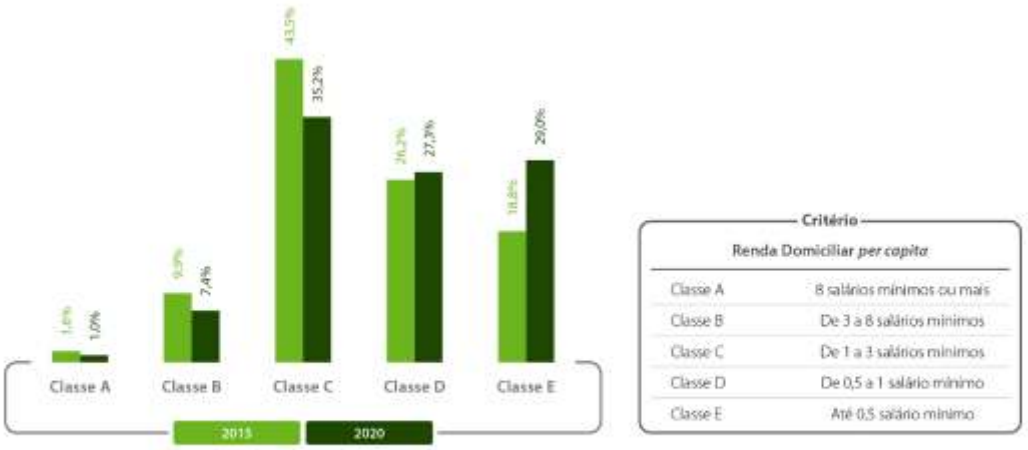


FIGURA VI: percentual de alunos inscritos no ensino superior *versus* classe social / renda domiciliar *per capita*.
FONTE: Instituto SEMESP, 2021.

Therefore, the good disposition to study can be affected by the perception of the humblest academics about their own identity, self-image and esteem, their expectations regarding the planned life project and the maintenance of assertiveness in relation to the coming profession. Figure VI reflects the number of employees related to the level of education. In these circumstances, a nursing degree can be favored by the development of resilience, identity belonging, and strengthening of support networks that this public so badly needs to overcome adversity (Oliveira, 2023).

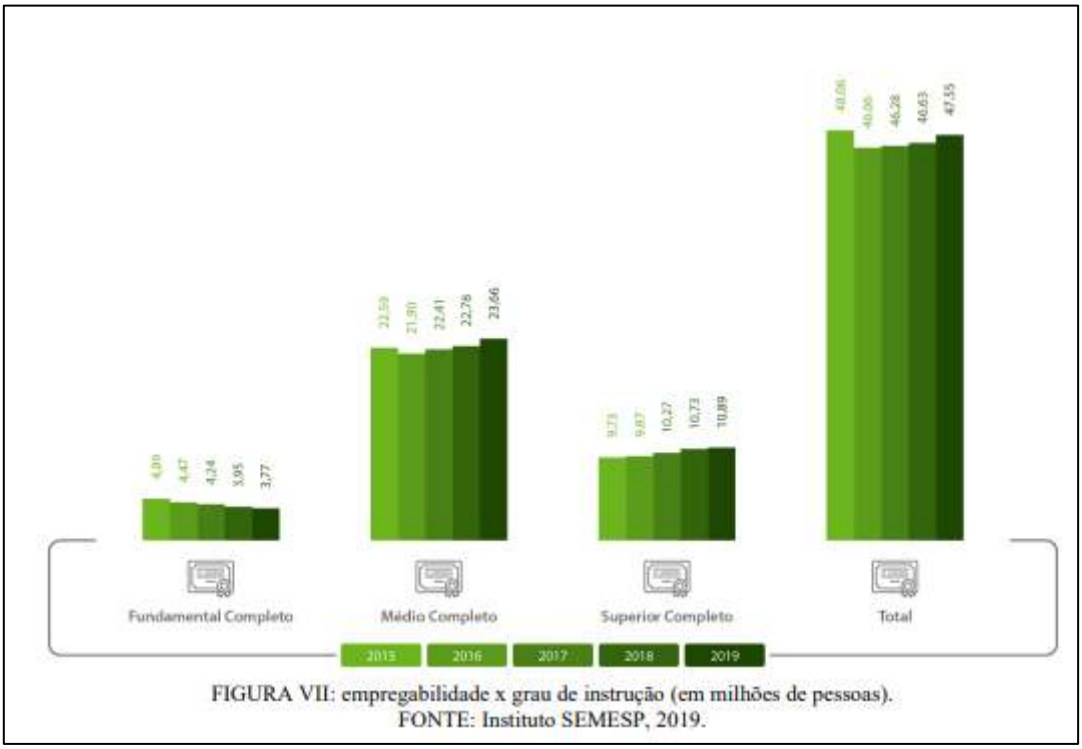


FIGURA VII: empregabilidade x grau de instrução (em milhões de pessoas).
FONTE: Instituto SEMESP, 2019.

The degree of professional qualification, the salary and the expectations of the student in relation to the career in nursing can influence their absenteeism, dropout or permanence in the undergraduate course in different ways. According to some studies, such precedents would be related

to the stimulus, commitment and the fact that the undergraduate recognizes himself – authorically – in the service he develops, in such a way that these items can be decisive in the option to continue or abandon the career. Thus, employability refers to the ability to obtain and maintain an occupation in the area of training – which depends on both the conditions of the labor market and the skills of the worker. Nursing is, in itself, a field that is in high demand in the country, a fact that can attract many students to the course (Fernandes, 2022). However, the attractiveness of employment also involves aspects such as effective participation in decisions and the development of autonomy – not always guaranteed to nurses (Bridi; Axe; Lima, 2015). In addition, it can be affected by factors such as competition, precariousness, overload and unhealthy working conditions, which generate stress and exhaustion (both among undergraduates and in professionals who have already graduated). Another element to be analyzed is remuneration, since salary is important to ensure the subsistence, quality of life and personal fulfillment of the worker – and can also be seen as an indicator of prestige, status and power. In Brazil, the category's revenue still varies according to experience, level of specialization, geographic region, allocation sector, and type of employment relationship, although Law No. 14,434/2022 was recently sanctioned, which ensures the national wage floor and a 30-hour workweek (Brasil, 2022). In general, the salary of nurses (R$ 4,750.00) is higher than that of technicians (R$ 3,325.00) and nursing assistants (R$ 2,375.00) – and, however, lower than that of doctors and other health professions. This remuneration, it is known, can induce the choice and permanence of students in the nursing course, as it reflects one – but not the only one – of their main expectations of professional appreciation.

With regard to improvement strategies aimed at higher education, it is hoped that the notes of this review plausibly demonstrate that the reduction of the workload can indeed favor the reduction of absences and dropouts, generating greater productivity, permanence and satisfaction. In addition, such action allows students to make better and rational use of their time – using it to rest or to dedicate it to family and studies. Recharged, they would return to work with new motivation, although too much idleness should also be avoided.

The results of the quantitative data analysis also showed that absenteeism among undergraduate nursing students is a significant obstacle, so that justified absences represent the majority of absenteeism cases (health problems are the most common reason). Unjustified cases, in turn, represent a smaller proportion of cases, with dissatisfaction with studies, lack of opportunities for professional development and inadequate study conditions being the most recurrent allegations.

The dropout of undergraduate nursing students is also an obstacle that should not be ignored. It is higher among students with less than two years of course and who study at night, especially among black women.

CONCLUSION

This study sought to analyze the causes, consequences and improvement strategies aimed at higher education, with the objective of facing the challenges related to absenteeism and dropout in the nursing course. From the literature review and data analysis, it was identified that such phenomena are associated with a variety of factors, which can act in isolation or in combination.

In this context, it is imperative to implement improvement strategies aimed at higher education, aiming at the prevention, reduction or elimination of absenteeism and dropout in the course. To this end, proposals such as improving working and study conditions stand out, ensuring adequate infrastructure, sufficient material and human resources, as well as safety, hygiene, comfort and ergonomics conditions that favor the performance and well-being of education professionals and students.

It is also proposed to value and recognize work and study in nursing, through fair remuneration, benefits, incentives, career opportunities, scholarships, aids and feedback systems that stimulate the motivation, satisfaction and self-esteem of professionals and academics. In addition, it is important to adjust the workload and distribution of activities, respecting the limits and needs of those involved, and to encourage communication, cooperation and integration among the student body.

These actions aim to create spaces for dialogue, exchange of experiences, participation and collaboration, strengthening bonds and promoting harmony and a sense of team. In addition, it is essential to prevent and treat physical and mental illnesses, providing adequate assistance, guidance and monitoring, as well as developing informative and training actions for students, especially beginners, addressing essential topics for their preparation and continuous qualification.

Innovating and diversifying teaching and learning methodologies, using technological and pedagogical resources that favor interaction and the applicability of acquired knowledge, is also necessary. Finally, adopting a personalized and adaptive approach, which considers the individual characteristics and needs of students, is essential to meet, respect, and value diversity and human uniqueness.

These strategies, however, require the involvement and commitment of all actors in the teaching-learning process, in addition to careful planning, organization, execution, monitoring, and frequent evaluation to ensure the effectiveness of the actions implemented. Therefore, it is concluded that absenteeism and dropout in nursing are complex and multifactorial issues, demanding a systemic, integrated and participatory approach, aiming at the continuous improvement of the course and the effective performance of professionals and students.

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