

# IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT IN NURSES' ACADEMIC SATISFACTION

## IMPORTÂNCIA DE OPORTUNIDADES DE DESENVOLVIMENTO E APOIO INSTITUCIONAL NA SATISFAÇÃO ACADÊMICA DE ENFERMEIROS

## IMPORTANCIA DE OPORTUNIDADES DE DESARROLLO Y APOYO INSTITUCIONAL EN LA SATISFACCIÓN ACADÉMICA DE ENFERMEROS

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**Objectives:** identify the academic satisfaction of clinical nurses and associate the nurses' sociodemographic, educational and professional characteristics with their academic satisfaction. **Method:** cross-sectional analytic study involving nurses. Two questionnaires were used: Scale of Higher Education Students' Satisfaction with Academic Experience; and a characterization questionnaire. **Results:** the study sample consisted of 397 nurses. Statistically significant associations between the dimensions Satisfaction with the Course and Development Opportunity and the variables sex ( $p < 0.00$ ) ( $p = 0.04$ ), education ( $p = 0.04$ ) ( $p = 0.02$ ), type of teaching institution ( $p = 0.01$ ) ( $p = 0.04$ ) and research opportunity ( $p = 0.02$ ) ( $p < 0.00$ ). **Conclusion:** the academic satisfaction was moderate. Male nurses who took a Master's program, studied in a public institution and had research opportunities were satisfied with the undergraduate program, course organization, extracurricular activities, relationships with colleagues, teachers' availability and knowledge and with the range of extracurricular activities and course curriculum offered.

**Descriptors:** Nursing. Personal satisfaction. Education, Nursing.

**Objetivos:** identificar a satisfação acadêmica de enfermeiros assistenciais e associar características sociodemográficas, educacionais e profissionais do enfermeiro com a sua satisfação acadêmica. **Método:** estudo analítico transversal realizado com enfermeiros. Foram utilizados dois questionários: escala de satisfação com a experiência acadêmica de estudantes do ensino superior; e um questionário de caracterização. **Resultados:** a amostra do estudo foi

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constituída de 397 enfermeiros. Encontrou-se associações estatisticamente significativas nas dimensões Satisfação com o Curso e Oportunidade de Desenvolvimento com as variáveis sexo ( $p < 0,00$ ) ( $p = 0,04$ ), escolaridade ( $p = 0,04$ ) ( $p = 0,02$ ), tipo de instituição de ensino ( $p = 0,01$ ) ( $p = 0,04$ ) e oportunidade em pesquisa ( $p = 0,02$ ) ( $p < 0,00$ ). Conclusão: a satisfação acadêmica foi moderada. Enfermeiros do sexo masculino, que fizeram mestrado, estudaram em instituição pública e tiveram oportunidade em pesquisa, apresentaram-se satisfeitos com a graduação, organização do curso, atividades extracurriculares, relacionamentos com colegas, disponibilidade e conhecimento dos professores, e com a diversidade das atividades extracurriculares e currículo do curso oferecido.

**Descritores:** Enfermagem. Satisfação pessoal. Educação em enfermagem.

Objetivos: identificar la satisfacción académica de enfermeros asistenciales y asociar características sociodemográficas, educativas y profesionales del enfermero con su satisfacción académica. Método: estudio analítico transversal, con enfermeros. Se utilizaron dos cuestionarios: escala de satisfacción con la experiencia académica de estudiantes de enseñanza superior; y cuestionario de caracterización. Resultados: muestra del estudio constituida de 397 enfermeros. Hubo asociación estadísticamente significativa en las dimensiones Satisfacción con el Curso y Oportunidad de Desarrollo con las variables sexo ( $p < 0,00$ ) ( $p = 0,04$ ), escolaridad ( $p = 0,04$ ) ( $p = 0,02$ ) ( $p = 0,02$ ), tipo de institución de enseñanza ( $p = 0,01$ ) ( $p = 0,04$ ) y oportunidad en investigación ( $p = 0,02$ ) ( $p < 0,00$ ). Conclusión: la satisfacción académica fue moderada. Los enfermeros del sexo masculino, que realizaron maestría, estudiaron en institución pública y tuvieron oportunidad en investigación, se presentaron satisfechos con la graduación, organización del curso, actividades extracurriculares, relaciones con colegas, disponibilidad y conocimiento de profesores, y con la diversidad de las actividades extracurriculares y currículo del curso ofrecido.

**Descritores:** Enfermería. Satisfacción personal. Educación en enfermería.

## Introduction

To generate success and academic satisfaction, Higher Education Institutions (HEI) need to provide resources and opportunities for professional development throughout the initial undergraduate education process. It is known, however, that students' failure and complaints of dissatisfaction refer to the context and organization of the academic curriculum, as well as the idealized expectations related to the course<sup>(1)</sup>.

The Pedagogical Course Projects (PPC) in Nursing define the essential skills for the general education of nurses and should translate the epistemological and pedagogical aspects of the National Curricular Guidelines (NCG). These recommend the early insertion of students in local health systems and services, in order to motivate them to build a professional identity, based on and for work within the Unified Health System (SUS). Therefore, they need to include educational strategies such as internships, active learning methods, among other complementary activities and to improve the care provided to the population<sup>(2)</sup>.

Satisfaction with academic experience is achieved when an expected result is achieved, related to the individual's expectation<sup>(3)</sup>. On the other hand, there is lower student performance, greater insecurity and an increase in the possibility of drop-out when the HEI structure does not meet students' expectations<sup>(4)</sup>. Thus, knowing the satisfactions or dissatisfactions of the students can help to understand how the academic experience can impact the future professionals' performance<sup>(4)</sup>.

Nursing education should cover the development of technical-scientific, ethical-political and relational skills, aiming to sensitize and prepare them to face situations and constant changes in the job world. This perspective is supported by the NCG, which emphasize the importance of the future nurse performing her occupational activities with essential skills<sup>(5)</sup>.

Nurses who are satisfied with academic experiences are more likely to consider themselves successful and to feel job satisfaction. The factors that are most strongly related with academic satisfaction are those that provide stimuli and opportunities for students to

experience in practice what was taught in the classroom during the undergraduate nursing course<sup>(6)</sup>.

Future nurses report on the need for a new academic organization committed to the formation of critical and reflexive citizens, based on humanistic knowledge and interpersonal skills that add social values. Thus, acquiring and reproducing knowledge becomes insufficient and undergraduate students themselves require more interaction between theory and practice and greater application of active, dialogic and participatory methods to promote relevant learning<sup>(7)</sup>.

It is important to understand the meaning of academic satisfaction and the respective factors that influence the academic trajectory positively or negatively<sup>(4)</sup>. In nursing, this understanding will help to meet the needs of the students and align their expectations regarding the HEI's opportunities for their education, in addition to the correspondence with the NCG. It is a continuous process between identifying aspects that can be improved and reformulated according to the academic satisfaction result and realigning the PPC and the institutional structure.

Thus, the objectives of this study were to identify the academic satisfaction of nurses and to associate sociodemographic, educational and professional characteristics of nurses with their academic satisfaction.

## Method

Cross-sectional analytical study, in which academic satisfaction was adopted as a dependent variable and sociodemographic, educational and professional characteristics as independent variables.

The study participants were nurses who worked or had already worked in the care area and had an active profile on the social network Facebook<sup>®</sup>. Data collection was performed in a virtual environment with nurses affiliated with three public hospitals in the interior of São Paulo, Brazil, and with nurses who participated in public groups related to nursing on Facebook<sup>®</sup>.

For direct recruitment, the nurses were contacted in the work environment, after authorization from the institutions and the Research Ethics Committee. They were informed about the research and invited to participate. After accepting, they informed the profile name on Facebook<sup>®</sup>, where they received an individual invitation via message and a link to access the questionnaire.

Indirect recruitment occurred in two ways. A link was published in the timeline of public groups related to nursing on Facebook<sup>®</sup>, inviting nurses to participate in the research. In addition, nurses with personal profiles linked to the researchers were invited to collaborate with the research by private message.

In order to guarantee the veracity of the information and to prevent duplicity of responses, identification was required with full name and registration number in the Regional Nursing Council (COREN). Participants whose records were not located on regional council sites were excluded from the sample. For questionnaires answered more than once, only the participant's first submission was kept.

Data collection took place between June and November 2016, and all participants answered two questionnaires made available on Google Drive<sup>®</sup>. The first screen after accessing the instrument was the Informed Consent Term (TCI). The consent was obtained through electronic acceptance. To do so, the participant should click on "I agree to participate in the research" to proceed. If the choice was "I do not agree to participate in the research", the participant would be directed to a thank-you page, ending the participation.

The first questionnaire, characterizing the participants, contained sociodemographic (age, origin, sex, marital status, self-reported skin color, religion, personal income), educational (complete education, higher education institution where the nursing degree was obtained, participation in academic activities) and professional variables (time since graduation, background education in nursing as an auxiliary or nursing technician, shift and work unit).

The second questionnaire used was the Scale of Higher Education Students' Satisfaction with Academic Experience (ESEA), consisting of 35 items divided into three dimensions (satisfaction with the course, development opportunity and satisfaction with the institution). The answers are given on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "dissatisfied" to "totally satisfied". The total score ranges from 55 to 175, and the higher the satisfaction with the academic experience, the higher the score<sup>(6)</sup>.

Descriptive analysis (absolute and relative frequency, position measures and standard deviation) and inferential analysis were performed. The data were analyzed in the statistical program R Core Team 2016<sup>®</sup>.

To compare the quantitative variables with the instrument scores, the Spearman Correlation Test was used; the Kruskal-Wallis test and the Mann-Whitney test were applied in the association of the categorical variables with the scores. The level of significance adopted in the tests was 0.05. When the association test was significant, the p-values were analyzed in two-to-two comparisons by the Bonferroni criterion; mutually different groups obtain a lower p-value than the general p-value set.

The development of the study met the Brazilian and international standards of research

ethics involving human beings and received approval under Opinion 1.562.760 from the Ethics and Research Committee at *Universidade de Guarulhos* (UNG).

## Results

The study sample consisted of 397 nurses with a mean age of 34.72 years ( $\pm$  8.10), with mean time since graduation of 6.84 ( $\pm$  5.15). The majority was female (n = 363, 91.44%), catholic (n = 216, 54.41%) and white (n = 281; 70.78%); from the Southeast (n = 337, 84.89%). The highest frequencies were for married people (n = 195; 49.12%), with income of up to three minimum wages (n = 116; 29.22%).

The majority of the professionals graduated from private universities (n = 331, 83.38%), attended specialization (n = 212, 53.40%), had no prior training in the nursing area before their undergraduate degree (n = 218; 54.91%). Less than half participated in scientific events during their undergraduate program (n = 136, 34.26%), was working and/or worked in hospitalization units (n = 165, 41.56%) and in a full-time shift of 8 hours per day (n=148; 37.28%). The nurses' total mean answer scores concerning the ESEA was 113.57 ( $\pm$ 20.62), slightly superior to the median of the instrument<sup>(105)</sup>, which indicates moderate academic satisfaction (Table 1).

**Table 1** – Description of total and dimension scores of Scale of Higher Education Students' Satisfaction with Academic Experience. Guarulhos, São Paulo, Brazil, 2016. (N=397)

Variables	Number of items	Score Range	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Median	Maximum
Satisfaction with the course	13	13-65	44.92	8.02	28	43	65
Development opportunity	10	10-50	30.60	6.42	16	30	50
Satisfaction with the institution	12	12-60	38.04	8.07	19	36	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>35-175</b>	<b>113.5</b>	<b>20.5</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>175</b>

Source: Created by the authors

The ESEA items with the highest mean scores were related to the dimension "Satisfaction with the course", more specifically concerning the

relations with colleagues and teachers, satisfaction with the teachers' knowledge on the course contents they teach and personal engagement

in course activities. The ESEA items with the lowest averages focused on the dimension Development opportunity, appointing the students' dissatisfaction with the institutional role

of creating personal development opportunities, organizing social events and support programs (Table 2).

**Table 2** – Descriptive analysis of items in the Scale of Higher Education Students' Satisfaction with Academic Experience. Guarulhos, São Paulo, Brazil, 2016. (N=397)

<b>Dimension 1 – Satisfaction with the course</b>			
<b>Items</b>	<b>Assertions</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
5	Relationship with fellow students	3.70	0.86
13	Teachers' knowledge on the content of the subjects they teach	3.70	0.80
1	Relationship with teachers	3.61	0.82
12	Teachers' interest in attending to students during classes	3.51	0.84
33	Teachers' availability to attend to students beyond the classroom	3.51	0.84
8	Match between personal engagement in the course and academic performance achieved	3.47	0.80
31	Relevance of course contents	3.44	0.80
35	Match between tasks required and execution time established by the teachers	3.44	0.80
14	Acknowledgement by the teachers of my engagement in my education	3.43	0.82
21	Institutional commitment to the quality of education	3.34	0.88
34	Match between the content and the education	3.34	0.88
28	Class strategy used by the teachers	3.22	0.78
25	Assessment proposed by the teachers	3.16	0.73
<b>Dimension 2 – Development opportunity</b>			
<b>Items</b>	<b>Assertions</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
9	Personal engagement in course activities	3.63	0.76
3	Course curriculum	3.41	0.78
26	Match between my financial investment to pay for my courses and the education I received	3.19	0.89
2	Range of extracurricular activities the institution offers	3.09	0.95
11	Conditions offered for my personal development	3.06	0.90
17	Condition to enter the professional area of my educational background	3.05	0.99
24	Personal development opportunity offered by the institution	2.87	0.92
6	Social events offered by the institution	2.84	0.92
10	Student support programs or services offered by the institution	2.74	0.89
23	Financial support program offered by the institution	2.67	1.09
<b>Dimension 3 – Satisfaction with the institution</b>			
<b>Items</b>	<b>Assertions</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
27	Cleanliness of the institution	3.47	0.86
18	Library collection available	3.35	0.95
4	Audiovisual resources and equipment available in the institution	3.28	0.89
16	Service and clarity of the information offered by the library attendants	3.25	0.97
29	Services offered by the library	3.22	0.84
22	Physical infrastructure of the institution	3.17	0.87
32	Location of different institutional sectors	3.17	0.87
19	Safety offered by the institution	3.10	0.96
20	Classroom facilities	3.05	0.91
30	Comfort of institutional facilities	3.04	0.85
7	Service and clarity of the information offered by the secretary attendants	3.00	0.93
15	Equipment and software offered by the informatics laboratory	2.90	0.99

Source: Created by the authors

A statistically significant and negative correlation was found when comparing the dimension Development Opportunity with the nurse's time since graduation. The longer they had graduate, the more dissatisfied they were

with the institutional responsibility for offering extracurricular activities, the match between the course curriculum and the practice and job market and academic support (Table 3).

**Table 3** – Correlation between the dimensions of the Scale of Higher Education Students' Satisfaction with Academic Experience and the time since graduation and age. Guarulhos, São Paulo, Brazil, 2016. (N=397)

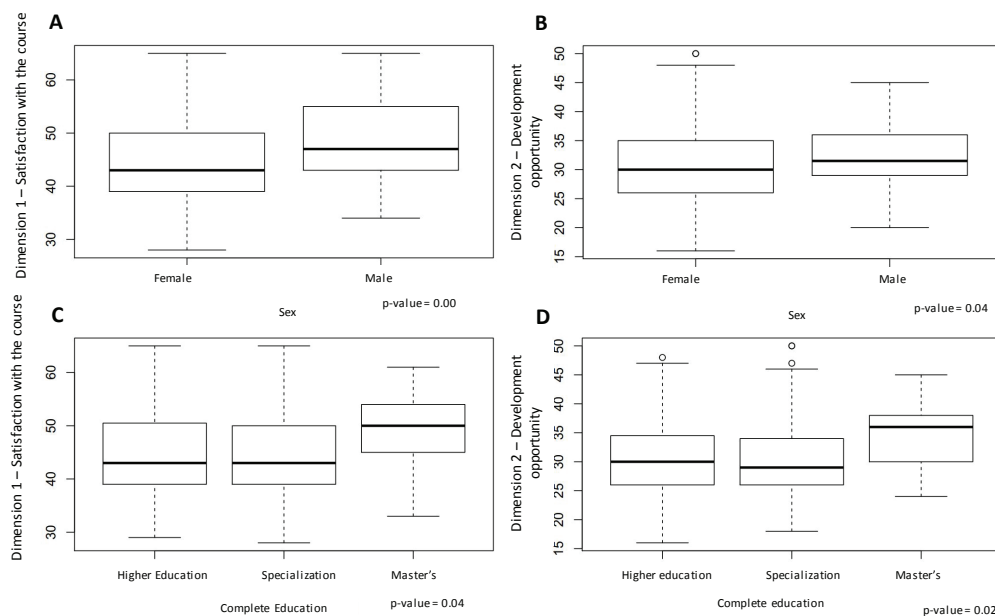
ESEA Dimensions	Time since Graduation		Age	
	r	p-value	r	p-value
Satisfaction with the course	-0,07	0,14	-0,06	0,20
Development opportunity	-0,10	0,04	-0,06	0,18
Satisfaction with the institution	-0,07	0,15	0,01	0,74

Source: Created by the authors

Statistically significant associations were found in the dimension Satisfaction with the course and between Development opportunity and sex, education, type of institution where the degree was obtained and research opportunity. The findings showed that the male nurses, who studied at a public institution and had some research opportunity were the most satisfied with

their undergraduate program, course organization, extracurricular activities, relationship with teachers, fellow students, teachers' availability and knowledge, besides greater satisfaction with the range of extracurricular activities and the course curriculum offered by the teaching institution (Graphs 1 and 2).

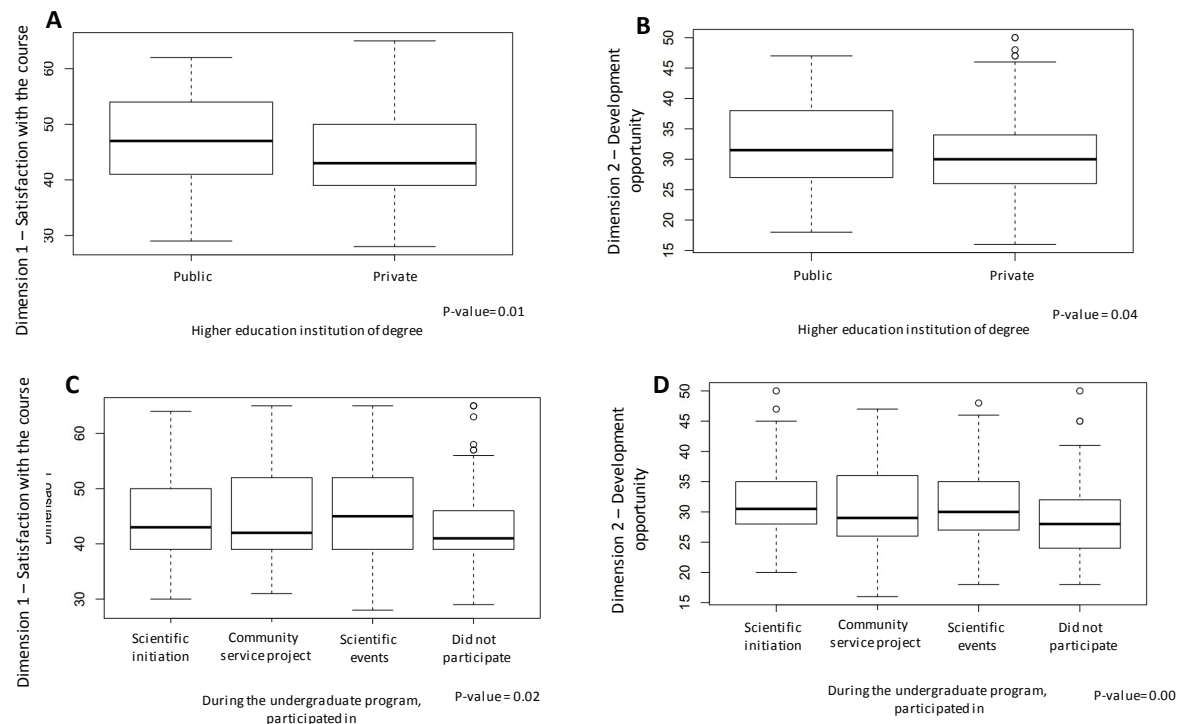
**Graph 1** – Statistically significant associations of variables sex and education with Higher Education Students' Academic Experience. Guarulhos, São Paulo, Brazil, 2016. (N=397)



Source: Created by the authors.

Legend: p-value: significance level. Result of two by two comparison using the Bonferroni method: C: Master's versus higher (p-value 0.02); master's versus specialization (p-value 0.01). D: Master's versus higher (p-value 0.01); Master's versus specialization (p-value 0.00). A and B: Mann-Whitney test. C and D: Kruskal-Wallis test.

**Graph 2** – Statistically significant associations of variables type of institution where degree was obtained and research opportunities with Higher Education Students' Academic Experience. Guarulhos, São Paulo, Brazil, 2016. (N=397)



Source: Created by the authors.

Legend: p-value: significance level. Result of two by two comparison using the Bonferroni method: C: did not participate in research activities versus others (p-value 0.00). D: did not participate in research activities versus scientific initiation (p-value 0.00). A and B: Mann-Whitney test. C and D: Kruskal-Wallis test.

## Discussion

The nurses who participated in this study showed moderate academic satisfaction, with higher averages in terms of relationships with colleagues and teachers, teacher knowledge and personal engagement in the course activities. There was dissatisfaction though in the items related to the development opportunity concerning the institutional role of generating opportunities for personal development, social events and institutional programs to support students.

Authors<sup>(8-10)</sup> highlight the importance of the teacher in academic satisfaction. The student who enters the university has a perspective on what he will learn during undergraduate education and wants to be stimulated through

work and integration among the disciplines in order to become interested and feel satisfied<sup>(8)</sup>.

The teachers need to understand the extent and responsibility of their role. The permanent search for knowledge, clarity regarding their position in the constantly changing world and the critical sense to classify and select different technologies (face-to-face and/or digital) converge in the development of the necessary skills for teaching, being able to exercise teaching effectively. As for the institutions, it is up to them to provide the continuous improvement of those professionals<sup>(9)</sup>.

The teacher's professional background greatly influences student learning. Especially when the relationship between them is solidary, the learning environment and the diversity of educational materials favors learning and generates a positive and cumulative effect of

satisfaction and motivation of nursing students<sup>(10)</sup>. In the aforementioned study, however, the nurses with a longer time since graduation reported greater dissatisfaction with the responsibility of the HEI regarding the supply of extracurricular activities and the mismatch between the course curriculum and the professional practice and the potential insertion in the job market. These<sup>(10)</sup> and other study results<sup>(11-13)</sup> coincide with those found in this study, which advances in the understanding and need to foster opportunities for undergraduate nursing students in these areas.

Participation in research, community service and scientific initiation programs contributes to professional training, as it enables student involvement in extracurricular activities that emphasize the learning and enrichment of their curriculum, with a view to acting in professional practice<sup>(11)</sup>.

The students' search for extracurricular activities is justified because they recognize the need to take on greater responsibility for their present and future professional career. Some realize that not all the contents necessary for their education can be addressed in the classroom and seek this knowledge through alternatives such as extracurricular activities in community service and research<sup>(12)</sup>.

Offering extraclass activities helps the student to develop critical thinking and proper perception of themselves, the reality, the job market and their professional projection. In this sense, these activities contribute to the self-knowledge necessary for the students to build their professional profile, enhance their analytical capacity and develop their professional identity<sup>(13)</sup>.

Another relevant result of this study was the identification that male nurses who hold Master's degrees, studied in public institutions and had the opportunity to research are more satisfied with the degree and with the development opportunities offered by the institutions.

Authors reinforce the fundamental role of the university in student education, by offering opportunities for their development both in

the classroom and in extraclass activities, and by contributing to their future insertion in a job world in constant transformations and that demands from the future professional a critical, reflexive and constructive capacity<sup>(13)</sup>.

A positive perspective is to consider the use of active methods in the educational process in Nursing. By assisting in the association between theory and practice, these methods favor coping with challenging situations in the workplace, which require critical thinking, creativity and decision making. Incorporating good teaching practices, which result in meaningful learning, goes beyond the know-how. In developing the dimensions of knowing how to act, knowing how to be and knowing how to live with others from the beginning of the academic education, students are provoked to reflect on their social role and their professional potential<sup>(14)</sup>.

Problem-based learning (PBL) exemplifies one of these active methods that contribute to high satisfaction in nursing students, but require organizational changes from the HEI. Nevertheless, after the implementation of practical classes with PBL, researchers identified 78% of student approval, with reports of high satisfaction with this new approach to teaching, the educational resources available and the contents presented in a useful, practical and stimulating manner for student development and responsibility<sup>(15)</sup>. As regards the clinical practicums in the Nursing course, a study<sup>(16)</sup> demonstrated that most students (70%) feel satisfied with the teaching activities in the practicums and internships, as well as with the teachers' behavior to stimulate, grant support during the practices and facilitate in-service learning<sup>(16)</sup>.

The findings of this study refer to important issues that have occurred in Brazilian higher education and which, directly or indirectly, are related to academic satisfaction: the increase in the number of nursing undergraduate courses and the requirement of teacher qualification for the training challenges of the nursing workforce. There has been a significant advance in recent decades, with important changes in both institutional functioning, curricular configuration,



teacher qualifications, institutionalization of research, intellectual production, quality of education offered, diversity of courses offered, increase in number of students and, consequently, the need for an increase in the teaching staff<sup>(17)</sup>.

Considering the period from 1991 to 2012, the expansion of courses in the Brazilian territory amounted to 393%. The Southeast encompasses 43% of nursing undergraduate courses in the country, 36.73% in São Paulo, followed by the Northeast with 24.12%, the South with 14.61%, the Midwest 10.96%, and North with 7.3%<sup>(18-19)</sup>. In 2016, undergraduate Nursing courses totaled 689.

Nursing has become one of the five most demanded professions in Brazil, and the situation of this disorderly growth requires a critical analysis, as courses have become expensive and the quality of education worrying<sup>(18-19)</sup>, negatively influencing the work process of this future professional<sup>(19-20)</sup>. Despite the fact that the Nursing Undergraduate Program's NCG recommend generalist, humanistic, critical and reflexive education for the construction of the Brazilian nurses' profile, the requirement for the teaching staff is that it consists of Specialists, Master's and Doctoral graduates who are knowledgeable not only about a certain activity area<sup>(21)</sup>. The increase in the number of institutions, sometimes without control or quality assurance, justifies the perceived lack of institutional support. On the other hand, the requirement of a minimum number of Master's and Doctoral graduates in undergraduate courses may have influenced the academic satisfaction, in relation to the relationship with the teachers and the mastery of the content expressed in the classes.

This increase in HEI favors the constitution of more fragile employment contracts for the teaching staff, limiting the inclusion of undergraduate students in nursing to a more comprehensive education, with opportunities in research and community services. The expansion in the number of HEI demands great effort in the definition of operating standards, investment and quality. The mission of higher education should safeguard the development of scientific research, for example, because it strongly influences the

construction of a pedagogical, administrative and institutional identity<sup>(22)</sup>.

In view of the unfavorable relationship between the growth in the supply of nursing courses and academic satisfaction, it is essential that the professionals who work in HEIs commit themselves to enhancing the performance of education professionals and implementing policies for the improvement of higher education<sup>(23)</sup>.

Although the results of this study show a context of professionals trained mainly in private educational institutions, the fact that it faithfully represents the reality and conditions of higher education in Brazil shows its importance.

## Conclusion

In this study, academic satisfaction was moderate, as a more positive evaluation was found of the relationships developed in the university context and the teachers' knowledge mastery. The reasons for dissatisfaction were related to institutional support and lack of development opportunities.

Male nurses, who held a master's degree, studied in a public institution and had the opportunity to engage in research were satisfied with the undergraduate program, course organization, extracurricular activities, relationships with fellow students, availability and knowledge of teachers, and with the range of extracurricular activities and the course curriculum offered.

The dissatisfaction was higher among the nurses with longer time since graduation and was related to the opportunities offered by the institution, the extracurricular activities available, the mismatch between the course curriculum and the practical activities and the job market, besides the academic support.

## Collaborations:

1. conception, design, analysis and interpretation of data: Francine da Costa Alves and Ana Claudia Giesbrecht Puggina;

2. writing of the article and relevant critical review of the intellectual content: Francine da Costa Alves, Máira Rosa Apostólico, Alfredo Almeida Pina-Oliveira and Ana Claudia Giesbrecht Puggina;

3. final approval of the version to be published: Francine da Costa Alves, Máira Rosa Apostólico, Alfredo Almeida Pina-Oliveira and Ana Claudia Giesbrecht Puggina.

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