

THEORETICAL APPROACHES IN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH OF NURSING WORKERS: AN INTEGRATIVE REVIEW*

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ABSTRACT: This integrative review aims to identify the theoretical approaches mentioned by authors in studies about the health of nursing workers. The search for publications between 2008 and 2012 occurred in three databases, using the descriptors of 'occupational health' and 'nursing'. The sample was made up of 18 articles which dealt specifically with the occupational health of nursing workers. Of the studies selected, the vast majority did not make clear the theoretical framework adopted, and among those which did, two approaches predominated: work and subjectivity, and health policies. The different theoretical approaches enriched the discussion showing the strong relation between organization, work conditions, and subjectivity and situations of pleasure and suffering in the nursing work.

DESCRIPTORS: Occupational health; Workforce; Nursing human resources.

ABORDAGENS TEÓRICAS SOBRE A SAÚDE DO TRABALHADOR DE ENFERMAGEM: REVISÃO INTEGRATIVA

RESUMO: Revisão integrativa com o objetivo de identificar as abordagens teóricas referidas por autores de estudos atuais sobre a saúde do trabalhador de enfermagem. A busca das publicações entre 2008 e 2012 ocorreu em três bases de dados, utilizando-se os descritores saúde do trabalhador e enfermagem. A amostra constituiu-se de 18 artigos. Dentre os artigos excluídos, por não conterem a abordagem teórica explicitada, encontraram-se estudos quantitativos, estudos transversais e de coorte. Os estudos selecionados possuem características semelhantes, relacionadas à subjetividade do trabalhador e as formas de organização do trabalho. As abordagens teóricas enriquecem a discussão sobre prazer e sofrimento no trabalho de enfermagem, ofertando um leque de possibilidades de interpretação para as situações vivenciadas pelos trabalhadores, e que independentemente da teoria adotada, os estudos corroboram entre si, no sentido de enriquecer o debate acerca da temática, alguns levantando situações emergentes, outros fornecendo subsídios para a melhoria das condições de trabalho.

DESCRIPTORES: Saúde do trabalhador; Força de trabalho; Recursos humanos de enfermagem.

ABORDAJES TEÓRICOS ACERCA DE LA SALUD DEL TRABAJADOR DE ENFERMERÍA: REVISIÓN INTEGRATIVA

RESUMEN: Revisión integrativa con el objetivo de identificar los abordajes teóricos referidos por autores de estudios actuales sobre la salud del trabajador de enfermería. La búsqueda de las publicaciones entre 2008 y 2012 ocurrió en tres bases de datos, utilizándose los descriptores salud del trabajador y enfermería. La muestra fue constituida de 18 artículos. Entre los artículos excluidos, por no contener el abordaje teórico explicitado, están estudios cuantitativos, estudios transversales y de cohorte. Los estudios seleccionados poseen características semejantes, relacionadas a la subjetividad del trabajador y las formas de organización del trabajo. Los abordajes teóricos enriquecen la discusión sobre placer y sufrimiento en el trabajo de enfermería, ofreciendo una serie de posibilidades de interpretación para las situaciones vivenciadas por los trabajadores, y que independentemente de la teoría adoptada, los estudios corroboran entre sí, en el sentido de enriquecer el debate acerca de la temática, algunos verificando situaciones, otros proveyendo subsídios para la mejoría de las condiciones de trabajo.

DESCRIPTORES: Salud del trabajador; Fuerza de trabajo; Recursos humanos de enfermería.

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INTRODUCTION

Human labor is a process of planned transformation of something with the objective of satisfying human needs⁽¹⁾. Occupational health is an area of public health which studies the relationship between work and health. The discipline's objective is to promote and protect occupational health. The interventions occur providing care to workers and through surveillance actions of the risks present in the work environment, work organization, working conditions, and in the hazards to occupational health.

The nursing workers, inserted in different institutionalized organizations, have different workloads and are exposed to different situations of occupational risk. It is known that nursing work is stressful, as, in addition to dealing with pain, suffering and death, nurses are in contact with a variety of physical, chemical, biological and ergonomic risks, as well as the risk of accidents, which impose upon them situations which can lead to becoming ill⁽²⁾. As a result, the work relations and the conditions of work can impact on the nursing professionals' health, as they directly influence the appearance and/or development of illnesses as a result of situations of risk such as stress and work overload, to which many professionals are exposed⁽³⁾.

Health institutions are typically unhealthy, and there are still limitations for instituting new forms of organizing the nursing work. However, it is possible to control the unhealthy conditions, the dangerousness and the hardship, as well as the workers' strain and exhaustion, allowing the workforce to recover⁽⁴⁾. In this regard, various studies have been proposed with a view to understanding this context in nursing, the expectation being to contribute to a healthier workforce. For this, the theories which propose to analyze human work assist in this comprehension.

Based in the above, the motivation arose to undertake an Integrative Review to identify the theoretical approaches used in studies about the occupational health of nursing workers. The aim of the review was to identify which theoretical approaches are mentioned by the authors on studies about nursing workers' health. Through the identification of the theoretical approaches used, those studying this issue will be able to have new conceptions for undertaking further studies.

METHOD

This is an exploratory-descriptive study, which follows the premises of the Integrative Review⁽⁵⁾. The databases studied were determined by subject (health and nursing), these being: Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), Latin American and Caribbean Health Sciences Literature (LILACS) and the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO). The studies were selected in the form of articles from periodicals, with a time cut-off of five years (2008-2012), the intention being to survey current data available online and in full.

The study occurred between 12th December 2012 and 15th February 2013, and the languages selected were Portuguese, Spanish and English. A combination of key-words (workers' health and nursing) was elaborated, with the Boolean operator AND in the search boxes which referred to the subject and words in the abstract, respectively. A total of 594 references was recovered from the databases.

Two criteria of eligibility were applied to the studies' abstracts: a) studies specifically related to the health of nursing professionals; b) some types of studies/publication were excluded: thesis, dissertations, letters, summaries, review articles, books, chapters of books, governmental documents, and newsletters.

Of the 594 references, 23 (2.9%) were excluded due to not providing the complete text, 212 (35.6%) for not meeting the inclusion criteria previously established in the literature review protocol, and 225 (57.07%) for not achieving one of the two eligibility criteria. A total of 134 references was accepted for the following phase. Of these, nine were duplicates and were therefore excluded. The final number of studies was 125.

The pre-selected works were organized in a matrix with the following items: number in order, title of the study, study country, database and theoretical approach used. The analysis of the studies followed the steps for analysis of qualitative data, with pre-analysis, exploration of the material, and treatment and interpretation of the results⁽⁶⁾. The studies were aggregated so as to structure the theoretical approaches adopted in the contemporary studies on the health of nursing workers. As this was an integrative review, and there was no direct involvement with human beings, the ethical questions to be analyzed by a Committee for Ethics in

Research with Human Beings were dispensed with.

RESULTS

A total of 125 studies was included, of which 48 (39%) were found in the CINAHL database, 30 (24%) in the SciELO database, and 47 (37%) in the LILACS database. Of this total, in 108 studies the theoretical approach was not explained by the authors, which does not represent that these studies did not have a theoretical approach; however, they were not included in the final analysis.

Among the articles excluded for not containing an explained theoretical approach, there were quantitative studies, transversal studies, and cohort studies, with distinct objectives. Some used scales of satisfaction and quality of life, others were epidemiological studies, in which one could observe the incidence of some pathologies related to the nursing work. In other studies, the

theoretical approach was identified implicitly; however, these were not included in the final sample, bearing in mind this review's objective.

A total of 18 studies had a theoretical framework identified, of which 12 were from Brazil, four from the United States, and one each from England and Taiwan, as shown in Table 2.

The fact that the largest number of publications was from Brazil is owed to the choice of the databases; the LILACS database contains bibliographic references in the area of Health published in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, and SciELO is an electronic library which encompasses a selected collection of Brazilian scientific periodicals.

The principal results found were compiled by theoretical framework, using the analysis of qualitative data for identifying the contributions of each type of framework to the development of the issue of Nursing Workers Health.

Board 1 - Distribution of the number of studies found with their respective percentage of each theoretical framework identified. Florianópolis-SC-Brazil, 2013

Theoretical Framework Adopted	n/%
Framework not identified	108/86,4%
Historical Dialectical Materialism/Workloads	03/2,4%
Pharmacology and Health Promotion	01/0,8%
Phenomenology	01/0,8%
Work and Subjectivity	05/4%
Health Policies	06/4,8%
Rosenstock's Health Belief Model	01/0,8%
Maslow's Basic Human Needs	01/0,8%

Authors	Country	Database	Theoretical Approach Used
MARTINS, J.T.; ROBAZZI, M.L.C.C.; BOBROFF, M.C.C. ⁽⁷⁾	Brasil	SciELO	Work and Subjectivity/ Foucault
GARCIA, A.B. et al ⁽⁸⁾	Brasil	SciELO	
CAMPOS, J.F.; DAVID, H.S.L. ⁽⁹⁾	Brasil	LILACS	
SOARES, R.J.O. et al ⁽¹⁰⁾	Brasil	SciELO	
GUAZINA, L.; TITTONI, J. ⁽¹¹⁾	Brasil	LILACS	
AZAMBUJA, E.P. et al ⁽¹²⁾	Brasil	SciELO	Historical-dialectical Materialism/Workloads
SECCO, I. A.O. et al ⁽¹³⁾	Brasil	LILACS	
MININEL, V.A.; BAPTISTA, P.C.P.; FELLI, V.E.A. ⁽¹⁴⁾	Brasil	CINAHL	
REGIS, L.F.L.V.; PORTO, I.S. ⁽¹⁵⁾	Brasil	SciELO	Maslow's Basic Human Needs
NEVES, H.C.N. et al. ⁽¹⁶⁾	Brasil	LILACS	Rosenstock's Health Beliefs Model
DIAS, J.R.F. et al. ⁽¹⁷⁾	Brasil	LILACS	Pharmacology and Health Promotion
BOBROFF, M.C.C.; MARTINS, J.T. ⁽¹⁸⁾	Brasil	LILACS	Health Policies
AZIZ, A. M. ⁽¹⁹⁾	Inglaterra	CINAHL	
FARIS, J. ⁽²⁰⁾	EUA	CINAHL	
MENZEL, N. N. ⁽²¹⁾	EUA	CINAHL	
WEISS, M. D.; BERNARDS, P.; PRICE, S.J. ⁽²²⁾	EUA	CINAHL	
LIN, Y. P.; HONG, O.; YEH, M. C. ⁽²³⁾	Taiwan	CINAHL	
LETVAK, S. ⁽²⁴⁾	EUA	CINAHL	Phenomenology

DISCUSSION

Work and Subjectivity

Subjectivity in the nursing work was treated differently in the studies. Music therapy was associated with stress reduction, enabling the worker to recover, resulting in better physical and psychological conditions for returning to work. Another study identified the factors which facilitate and hinder the pleasure in the work of nursing technicians. This study showed that the hindering factors of pleasure were more significant than the facilitating factors, creating an obstacle for care of oneself, and consequently creating demotivation and harm to the workers' health.

Satisfaction in the work is expressed in three of the five studies which addressed the issue of subjectivity. This is understood as pleasure in the work, and the main reasons for satisfaction in the nursing work are: the pay, liking what one does, recognition, teamwork, and the "ability to save lives"; in contrast, the

principal reasons for dissatisfaction in the work are: little or no autonomy, non-participative management, lack of support from line managers, lack of communication from the team, work overload, working conditions, violence, and the patients' suffering. Some studies emphasized that satisfaction in nursing work predicts higher retention of workers in the service, a lower rate of absenteeism, and lower turnover.

This theoretical approach allowed a better comprehension of the subjectivity intrinsic in the nursing work, but there are limitations in evaluating in depth the influences of the work on the workers' health, due to the subjectivity and complexity involved, such as health, suffering, disease and pleasure, among others.

In the studies found, one can observe that many of the professionals' subjective complaints, principally those related to conflictual situations, could be worked upon better, or even resolved, if the nursing professional received specialized emotional support.

Historical-Dialectical Materialism and Workloads

The work is the central category of analysis of Historical Materialism, as it is the simplest and most objective way to organize a society, and the basis of the social relationships is that of production, and ways of organizing the work.

The importance of analyzing the historical-social context, in which the nursing work is undertaken, is owed to the existence of macro- and micro-determinants which influence how the work is undertaken, as well as how it is divided, being able to create pleasure/satisfaction, suffering and/or illness⁽²⁵⁾.

Different from other sectors of capitalist production, production and health is operated in a specific way, and the nursing, as work, is strongly influenced by changes in the world of work in the health sector.

The studies' main findings refer to the work process of the nursing teams and to the physical and psychological burdens of the nursing workers. Physical strain appears with greatest frequency in the auxiliary nurses and nursing technicians, among whom musculoskeletal disorders are a constant. Pain is the factor which most compromises these professionals' work (spine, legs, feet and head), also being the biggest reason for absenteeism. Stress and psychological strain are more frequent among the nurses, and can be caused by innumerable factors, including: the way the work is organized, and workloads of 40 hours or more, night work, and coexisting with stressful situations (death, suffering and others). The psychological burden of nursing are manifested as a result of insufficient staff numbers, work which is little recognized and poorly paid, technical and technological complexity, and personal interrelationships which are inherent to this activity, which contribute to the emotional illnesses.

Maslow's Basic Human Needs

Maslow's theory is known as one of the most important theories of motivation. According to it, human beings' needs follow a hierarchy, meaning that when a person meets a need, another appears in its place, realizing a cycle⁽¹⁵⁾. When a need is not met, for any reason, it will

in somehow be transferred or compensated; motivation, therefore, is a cyclical state, and constant in personal life.

The study found indicates that the basic human needs of the nursing team are compromised: mainly the needs for safety and the physiological needs – which are the most basic ones. Because of this, the nursing team tends to reproduce dissatisfactions in the relation of care with the other, compromising it; the health institutions, therefore, must know how to recognize the stressful factors in the work, so as to seek and encourage coping strategies with a view to minimizing the professional stress.

Health Policies

The most frequent findings in the studies which refer to Health Policies deal with continuing education (training, empowerment of professionals, and adherence to PPE, Continuing Education Programs and Minimization of Occupational Risks). Changes in the policies for minimizing occupational stressors were also mentioned. Some ways for avoiding illness in the work were enormously cited (use of PPE, clinical follow-up following exposure to biological material or accidents with sharps, and redistribution of the work by shifts) as strategies to be adopted for improving the existing policies.

Rosenstock's Health Beliefs Model

The model proposed by Rosenstock⁽¹⁶⁾ considers the relationship between the perception which a person has of her susceptibility to contract a disease, and the severity of the disease per se. It is used to gain a better understanding of the factors which influence people's perception and beliefs, in order to obtain or maintain care for health.

Nursing workers know the risks to which they are exposed in the work environment. The study in question revealed that the workers understand that failure to use PPE increases the chances of acquiring occupational diseases, and that these are aware that their use does not exclude the risk of infection by pathogens. The study also revealed that poor adherence to the use of PPE is associated

with organizational, managerial and relational aspects, such as: inadequate physical structure, the availability and accessibility of PPE, lack of routines, work overload, stress, improvisation and strain in the work relationships.

Pharmacology and Health Promotion

The nursing team, specifically the teams which work in hospitals, are more vulnerable to health hazards, both in the physical and psychological dimensions, and this is due to a series of factors, such as: the poor working conditions, the exhausting working hours, and the routine difficulties, which favor the use of psychoactive substances⁽²⁶⁾.

The constant contact with patients, and the exposure to a variety of situations, compromises the physical, emotional and mental health of nurses. This vulnerability explains the high rate of stress, depression, tiredness and the occupational illnesses. Due to a lack of mechanisms and strategies for coping with these situations, the workers often resort to self-medication, which is a fairly common practice in Brazil⁽²⁷⁾.

The use of psychotropic substances by nursing workers is common. The study found referring to this issue emphasizes that the factors which favor this consumption are: periods of high stress, multiple pressurizing demands and dissatisfaction with the work department, team, or family, which makes it necessary for the professionals to have a better quality of life and work if they are to be able to avoid this issue.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a subjective science, which studies the phenomenon itself, aiming to recognize and clarify the phenomenon based on studies which consider the perspective of a specific spectator-subject⁽²⁸⁾.

Phenomenology seeks the essence of a specified phenomenon through the process of phenomenological reduction, and considers that all things are considered unfinished and are in a constant process of modification. Phenomenology is a scientific treatise relating to the description and classification of phenomena.

Recent studies also show the concern with the patient's safety, especially in relation to the response time in the care, as the patient's progression influences the nurses' health, in the sense that if the patient progresses negatively, the nurse tends to become overburdened, both physically and psychologically. Therefore, the health institutions must provide support in the work environment – especially psychological support – for coping with pain and depression.

The study found which used the phenomenological approach emphasizes that an aging nursing workforce directly impacts on the quality of the care provided to the patient, and that studies have shown that keeping these older nurses requires certain measures for maintenance of health, such as: more control over the work environment, recognition in the work, favorable work timetables, economic incentives, less strenuous jobs, which used their experience and education, ergonomic measures in the work environment, and better retirement programs.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In the search to better understand which theoretical approaches were used by contemporary authors in studies referent to occupational health of nursing workers, some theories emerged from this specific issue, with unique characteristics related to the subjectivity of the worker and all the forms of organization in which the work occurs.

The success and the good performance of the health institutions depend, among other factors, on healthy workers who are motivated for the work. The quality of the care and the production of workers who are stressed and/or have occupational illnesses are compromised, as are the institutions, as these cease to provide quality services, due to the high rates of absenteeism and medical leave.

The theoretical approaches found in the studies of this review enriched the discussion on pleasure and suffering in nursing work, offering a range of possibilities for interpreting the situations experienced by the workers.

It is important to emphasize that, even though they adopt different theories, the studies corroborate each other, in the sense of enriching the debate on this issue, with some raising

emerging situations, and others providing support for improving working conditions.

One can also observe that in spite of the significant number of publications found on workers' health, further studies are necessary, bearing in mind this issue's complexity, and that with new perspectives, these could contribute to a healthier nursing, with less suffering.

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