

# EVIDENCE-BASED NURSING: CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDIES IN BRAZIL

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**ABSTRACT:** The purpose of this integrative review was to characterize Brazilian studies on the practice of evidence-based nursing practice. The literature search was carried out between June and September 2014 in the Latin American and Caribbean Health Science Literature Database, the Scientific Electronic Library Online, and the National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health. Twenty-one articles were selected, all published in Brazilian journals between 2003 and 2004. The results indicate a greater number of level 5 reviews in comparison to other types of studies. Of these, most were integrative and systematic reviews directed at healthcare and teaching practices, developed in the Southeast of Brazil, by nursing professors who have a doctoral degree as their highest qualification. In conclusion, nurses in the healthcare context must be trained to search for, develop and use research in practical contexts in order to overcome the dichotomy between research and healthcare provision.

**DESCRIPTORS:** Evidence-based practice; Evidence-based nursing; Nursing research; Nursing.

## ENFERMAGEM BASEADA EM EVIDÊNCIA: CARACTERIZAÇÃO DOS ESTUDOS NO BRASIL

**RESUMO:** Revisão integrativa que objetivou caracterizar estudos brasileiros sobre prática de enfermagem baseada em evidências. A busca foi realizada no período de junho a setembro de 2014, na Literatura Latino-Americana e do Caribe em Ciências da Saúde, Scientific Electronic Library Online, e National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health. Foram selecionados 21 artigos, todos publicados em periódicos nacionais, no período de 2003 a 2014. Os resultados apontam para um maior número de revisões, com nível de evidência 5, em detrimento dos demais tipos de estudo encontrados. Com destaque, têm-se as revisões integrativas e sistemáticas direcionadas para a prática assistencial e de ensino, desenvolvidas na região sudeste, por enfermeiros com atuação no ensino com titulação máxima de doutor. Ressalta-se a necessidade de capacitação do enfermeiro assistencial na busca, desenvolvimento e utilização de pesquisas na prática, a fim de transpor a dicotomia entre a pesquisa e o cuidar.

**DESCRITORES:** Prática clínica baseada em evidências; Enfermagem baseada em evidências; Pesquisa em enfermagem; Enfermagem.

## ENFERMERÍA BASADA EN EVIDENCIA: CARACTERIZACIÓN DE LOS ESTUDIOS EN BRASIL

**RESUMEN:** Revisión integrativa cuya finalidad fue caracterizar estudios brasileños sobre práctica de enfermería basada en evidencias. La búsqueda fue realizada en el periodo de junio a septiembre de 2014, en la Literatura Latinoamericana y del Caribe en Ciencias de la Salud, Scientific Electronic Library Online, y National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health. Fueron seleccionados 21 artículos, todos publicados en periódicos nacionales, en el periodo de 2003 a 2014. Los resultados apuntan para un mayor número de revisiones, con nivel de evidencia 5, en detrimento de los demás tipos de estudio investigados. Se destacan revisiones integrativas y sistemáticas direccionadas para la práctica asistencial y de enseñanza, desarrolladas en la región sudeste, por enfermeros con actuación en la enseñanza con titulación máxima de doctor. Se destaca la necesidad de capacitación del enfermero asistencial en la búsqueda, desarrollo y utilización de investigaciones en la práctica, a fin de transponer la dicotomía entre la investigación y el cuidar.

**DESCRIPTORES:** Práctica clínica basada en evidencias; Enfermería basada en evidencias; Investigación en enfermería; Enfermería.

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**Received:** 09/04/2015

**Finalized:** 21/10/2015

## INTRODUCTION

The use of scientific evidence in nursing is based on studies that generate innovative practices that inform the actions and relations of nursing professionals in the health system and demonstrate the impact of such findings on professional practice<sup>(1)</sup>.

Evidence-based practice (EBP) is a safe and organized form of defining professional conduct, focused on providing solutions to problems based on the best scientific evidence<sup>(2-3)</sup>. The process involves defining a problem, searching, critically appraising the evidence available to make and implement the best decisions, evaluating findings and finally integrating these elements with the clinical competence of healthcare professionals and patient preferences<sup>(4-5)</sup>.

Scientific evidence is the basis of EBP, giving it the power to contribute to science, as it provides reliability to precepts of certain scientific knowledge<sup>(6-7)</sup>. Thus, EBP originates from relevant patient-oriented clinical research with the objective of improving diagnostic measures, prognosis, treatment, rehabilitation and prevention indicators<sup>(5)</sup>.

The information needed in the field of health is complex, and professionals have limited time to search for research results. This highlights the importance of reviews in this context, especially systematic reviews, as a resource when searching for necessary evidence<sup>(8)</sup>.

Even though the best approach to analyze and synthesize clinical research is the systematic review (SR) of controlled and randomized clinical trials (RCTs), there are also a significant number of integrative reviews being conducted. These help deepen the knowledge on the topic researched, promote the quality of health services and minimize operating costs<sup>(3,9-10)</sup>.

The changes that arise from using evidence-based nursing practices are relevant to greater professional development. However, few nurses operate in environments where actions are based on scientific evidence. Certain care practices are still based on empirical knowledge, which makes the practice incipient in the face of technological advances and acquisitions in the care process.

With the intent of knowing more about EBP research carried out by nursing professionals in Brazil and offering a basis for reflections on the use EBP in nursing, the guiding question of this study was: What are the characteristics of studies

about the practice of evidence-based nursing published by Brazilian researchers?

In light of the above, the aim of this study was to characterize Brazilian studies about the practice of evidence-based nursing in order to contribute to the improvement of nursing studies and the dissemination of scientific knowledge.

## METHOD

This was an integrative literature review carried out in six steps: research question formulation, followed by a literature search, data collection, critical analysis of the included studies, discussion of results and a presentation of the review<sup>(11)</sup>.

Based on the guiding question, pairs of researchers carried out the article search between June and September 2014 in the Latin American and Caribbean Health Science Literature Database (LILACS) and the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO). A free-text search was conducted with the following Health Sciences Descriptors (DeCS): evidence-based practice, evidence-based nursing, evidence-based medicine, nursing research, and nursing. Using controlled vocabulary, the following Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) terms were searched: Evidence-Based Practice, Evidence-Based Nursing, Evidence-Based Medicine, Nursing Research, and Nursing. The interaction between these descriptors was carried out with the Boolean operator AND.

Full-text articles that addressed Brazilian studies on evidence-based nursing were included in the review, whereas editorials and letters to the editor were excluded.

Our search strategy resulted in 423 full-text articles. For this review, 31 articles were pre-selected based on an analysis of their titles and abstracts. Duplicate articles were computed only once. Next, articles that met the inclusion criteria were fully evaluated. This process resulted in a sample of 21 studies, as illustrated in Table 1.

In order to categorize data, the researchers adapted an instrument<sup>(12)</sup> containing information on the articles (title, journal, year of publication, search location, and indicated key words); the study (objective, type of study, level of evidence, areas of health care, theoretical concepts/models, results, and conclusions); and the researchers (profession, field of work, and highest qualification).

Table 1 – Strategy for electronic search in virtual libraries and databases. Natal, RN, Brazil, 2014.

| CROSS-REFERENCES                                      | VIRTUAL LIBRARIES AND DATABASES |        |        |
|---|---------------------------------|--------|--------|
|   | LILACS                          | SciELO | PubMed |
| 1. Evidence-based practice AND Evidence-based nursing | 1                               | 5      | 2      |
| 2. Evidence-based nursing AND Nursing research        | 2                               | 2      | 0      |
| 3. Evidence-based practice AND Nursing research       | 0                               | 2      | 0      |
| 4. Evidence-based medicine AND Nursing                | 15                              | 0      | 4      |
| Total pre-selected articles                           | 18                              | 7      | 6      |
| Final sample  | 13                              | 5      | 4      |

Level of evidence (LE) of the studies was based on the criteria set forth by the Oxford Centre Evidence-Based Medicine<sup>(13)</sup>, as shown in Chart 1.

The results were presented using a comparative and descriptive chart. Absolute and relative frequencies were used to characterize studies and allow for a better analysis of the findings and present the evidence from the integrative review.

Chart 1 – Levels of evidence by type of study. Natal, Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil, 2014

| LE* | TYPE OF STUDY   |
|-----|---|
| 1A  | SR (with homogeneity) of RCTs. Well-designed RCTs with relevant clinical outcomes.                              |
| 1B  | Individual RCT (with narrow confidence interval).   |
| 1C  | All or none RCT. Study of controlled case series.   |
| 2A  | SR (with homogeneity) of cohort studies (with comparison groups and variable control)                           |
| 2B  | Individual cohort study (including low quality RCT; e.g., <80% follow-up)                                       |
| 2C  | “Outcomes” Research; ecological studies   |
| 3A  | SR (with homogeneity) of case-control studies.  |
| 3B  | Individual Case-Control Study.  |
| 4   | Case-series (and poor quality cohort and case-control studies)  |
| 5   | Expert opinion without explicit critical appraisal or based on physiology, bench research or “first principles” |

Source: Oxford Centre Evidence-Based Medicine<sup>(13)</sup>  
\*LE- Level of evidence

## RESULTS

The sample consisted of 21 studies. All the articles were coded in order to identify and compare findings. Chart 2 displays the characteristics of the studies according to authors, reference, year of publication, journal, and search location.

Chart 3 characterizes the articles by type of study, level of evidence, field of nursing work and theme of selected studies.

Considering type of study, 12 (57.1%) were review articles, of which six (21.6%) were integrative reviews, and two (9.5%) systematic reviews. Of the SR, two (9.5%) used RCTs and one (4.7%) adopted meta-synthesis as its methodology. The others were reflective (9.5%), state of the art (9.5%), descriptive (4.7%), trials (4.7%), methodological (4.7%), convergent care (4.7%) and case reports (4.7%). Of these studies, 11 (52.4%) were aimed at evidence-based interventions related to nursing practice or teaching and 10 (47.6%) were focused on research methodology, emphasizing the importance of the method in nursing professional practice and using EBP as their theoretical framework.

Of the selected articles, all were published in national journals, being that two belonged to a medical journal and the others were published in nursing journals, with special mention to the *Revista Latino-Americana de Enfermagem*, containing six publications. These studies were published recently in the literature, between 2003 and 2014, with the highest concentration in the last five years. All articles were in Portuguese, except for one in English<sup>(15)</sup>.

Regarding the location of the studies, 15 (71.4%) articles were produced in the Southeast region of Brazil, three (14.2%) in the South, two (9.6%) in the Northeast and one (4.8%) in the Center-West region. Most were conducted in the states of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, regions that hold the highest concentration of universities and the greatest dissemination of scientific knowledge via journals.

The descriptors identified in the studies included 71 terms, all present in the DeCS. Among them, the most common were: Evidence-Based Practice, Evidence-Based Nursing and Evidence-Based Medicine (15.5%), Nursing Research (11.2%), Nursing Care (11.2%), Review, Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis, (8.4%), Nursing (7%), and Decision Making (2.8%).

Chart 2 – Characteristics of studies by code A1 to A21, authors, reference, year of publication, journal, and search location. Natal, Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil, 2014

| CODE | AUTHORS (Reference)  | YEAR | JOURNAL  | SEARCH LOCATION |
|------|--|------|--|-----------------|
| A1   | Azevedo, Barbosa, Cassiani <sup>(14)</sup>                               | 2012 | Acta Paulista de Enfermagem                          | LILACS          |
| A2   | Silva, Chaves, Carvalho, Iunes <sup>(15)</sup>                           | 2013 | Acta Paulista de Enfermagem                          | LILACS          |
| A3   | Pedrolo, Danski, Mingorance, Lazzari, Méier, Crozeta <sup>(5)</sup>      | 2009 | Cogitare Enfermagem                                  | LILACS          |
| A4   | Silva, Galvão, Pereira, Silva <sup>(16)</sup>                            | 2013 | Revista da Sociedade Brasileira de Medicina Tropical | LILACS          |
| A5   | Rabelo, Aliti, Domingues, Assis, Saffi, Linhares, et al. <sup>(17)</sup> | 2007 | Clinical & Biomedical Research                       | LILACS          |
| A6   | Karino, Felli <sup>(18)</sup>  | 2012 | Ciência, Cuidado e Saúde                             | LILACS          |
| A7   | Vasconcelos, Damasceno, Lima, Pinheiro <sup>(9)</sup>                    | 2011 | Revista Latino-Americana de Enfermagem               | LILACS          |
| A8   | Galvão, Sawada, Mendes <sup>(19)</sup>                                   | 2003 | Revista da Escola de Enfermagem da USP               | LILACS          |
| A9   | Galvão, Sawada <sup>(10)</sup>   | 2003 | Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem                     | LILACS          |
| A10  | Santos, Pimenta, Nobre <sup>(6)</sup>                                    | 2007 | Revista Latino-Americana de Enfermagem               | LILACS          |
| A11  | Cruz, Pimenta <sup>(7)</sup>   | 2005 | Revista Latino-Americana de Enfermagem               | LILACS          |
| A12  | Galvão, Sawada, Trevizan <sup>(8)</sup>                                  | 2004 | Revista Latino-Americana de Enfermagem               | SciELO          |
| A13  | Domenico, Ide <sup>(20)</sup>  | 2003 | Revista Latino-Americana de Enfermagem               | SciELO          |
| A14  | Santos, Carvalho <sup>(21)</sup>   | 2012 | Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem                     | SciELO          |
| A15  | Mendes, Galvão <sup>(22)</sup>   | 2008 | Revista Latino-Americana de Enfermagem               | SciELO          |
| A16  | Silva, Nascimento, Salles <sup>(23)</sup>                                | 2012 | Texto & Contexto Enfermagem                          | SciELO          |
| A17  | Soares, Hoga, Peduzzi, Sangaleti, Yonekura, Silva <sup>(24)</sup>        | 2014 | Revista da Escola de Enfermagem da USP               | SciELO          |
| A18  | Júnior, Santos, Moura, Melo, Monteiro <sup>(25)</sup>                    | 2011 | Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem                     | PubMed          |
| A19  | Lacerda, Nunes, Batista, Egry, Graziano, Angelo, et al. <sup>(3)</sup>   | 2012 | Revista da Escola de Enfermagem da USP               | PubMed          |
| A20  | Toma, Rea <sup>(26)</sup>  | 2008 | Cadernos de Saúde Pública                            | PubMed          |
| A21  | Oliveira, Camacho, Souza <sup>(27)</sup>                                 | 2005 | Cadernos de Saúde Pública                            | PubMed          |

The studies presented a total of 76 researchers. Of these, 82.2% were nurses and 17.8% were from other professional areas, such as medicine, pharmacy, physical therapy and library science. In terms of field of nursing work, 69.3% of the researchers worked with higher education teaching, followed by health care (16.9%) and graduate and undergraduate students (13.8%). Of the authors who were nurses, 61.5% had a doctoral degree and 17% held a master's degree, 1.5% were specialists and the others were graduate and undergraduate students.

## DISCUSSION

The current technological advances can bring benefits to care processes. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the impacts they produce. In order to underpin the application of such technologies, researchers must validate knowledge and produce evidence, a process that can be undertaken with the use of evidence-based practice.<sup>(5)</sup>

Although EBP in Brazil is still underutilized in nursing, research in the field has increased. The growing development of research focused on

Chart 3 – Characteristics of A1 to A21 studies by type of study, level of evidence, field of nursing work and theme of study. Natal, Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil, 2014

| CODE | TYPE OF STUDY                                       | LE* | FIELD OF WORK                 | THEME OF STUDY   |
|------|---|-----|-------------------------------|--|
| A1   | Integrative review                                  | 5   | Oncology                      | Subcutaneous use of antibiotics in palliative care patients with difficult venous access |
| A2   | Methodological study                                | 5   | Dermatology                   | Assessment of the feet of diabetes mellitus patients                                     |
| A3   | Reflective  | 5   | Research                      | Evidence-based nursing practices   |
| A4   | Review of clinical trials and observational studies | 1B  | Dermatology                   | Treatment of American tegumentary leishmaniasis in special populations                   |
| A5   | Review of RCTs                                      | 1B  | Cardiology                    | Education and follow-up strategies for heart failure patients                            |
| A6   | Review  | 5   | Research                      | Contributions of the Joanna Briggs Institute to evidence-based nursing                   |
| A7   | Integrative review                                  | 5   | Women's health                | Nursing interventions used in early detection of cervical-uterine cancer                 |
| A8   | State of the art                                    | 5   | Research                      | Implementation of evidence-based practice in nursing                                     |
| A9   | Reflective  | 5   | Research                      | Implementation of evidence-based practice in nursing                                     |
| A10  | State of the art                                    | 5   | Research                      | Research question construction and evidence search                                       |
| A11  | Review  | 5   | Research                      | Evidence-based practice (EBP) in diagnostic decisions in nursing care                    |
| A12  | Review  | 5   | Research                      | Systematic review  |
| A13  | Case report   | 4   | Research                      | Evidence-based nursing   |
| A14  | Integrative review of RCTs                          | 5   | Orthopedics                   | Nursing interventions in arthritis care  |
| A15  | Integrative review                                  | 5   | Transplants                   | Nursing care provided to adult liver transplant patients                                 |
| A16  | Convergent-care study                               | 2C  | Critical care                 | Preventing ventilator-associated pneumonia   |
| A17  | Integrative review                                  | 5   | Research                      | Integrative review   |
| A18  | Systematic review and Meta-synthesis                | 3A  | Terminality                   | Death and dying  |
| A19  | Integrative review                                  | 5   | Research                      | Evidence-based practices (EBP) regarding prevention in human health                      |
| A20  | Trial with systematic reviews                       | 5   | Women's and children's health | Benefits of breastfeeding for maternal and child health                                  |
| A21  | Systematic review                                   | 3A  | Women's and children's health | Promoting, protecting and supporting breastfeeding in primary care                       |

\*LE- Level of Evidence

this area of nursing in recent years has resulted in studies that adopt EBP as their theoretical framework or that address methodological strategies for conducting quality evidence-based research, emphasizing the importance of the method in nursing practice<sup>(5)</sup>, as indicated by the results of this study.

The methodologies that can be employed in a given study depend on the investigated area of health care practice and its approaches. Integrative reviews are used in EPB and are a growing trend in nursing, as shown by the high frequency of these types of articles found in this review. This may be explained by the potential of this methodology to

systematically and rigorously synthesize findings from research that uses combined methodologies within the same study or to summarize findings related to the same theme. To this end, integrative reviews must adopt standards of excellence in terms of methodological rigor in order for their outcomes to provide significant contributions to science and clinical practice<sup>(24)</sup>.

Regarding level of evidence, most articles were classified as LE 5. This finding raises concern for the application of EBP, as systematic reviews and meta-analyses are the gold standard in research, at the top of the pyramid. This type of methodology has led to increased scientific production, both quantitative and qualitative, and has become the basis of the EBP movement in health<sup>(28-29)</sup>. Notwithstanding, the results of the present review found only two systematic reviews (9.5%).

This problem is due to the accumulation of information and the insignificant impact of the results produced on care practices, which favors decisions governed exclusively by opinions and the isolated experience of health professionals<sup>(10,30)</sup>. The scarce number of studies conducted by nurses with higher levels of evidence does not mean that these professionals are not carrying out interventions; however, it shows the fragility of methodological designs that are used to underpin interventions conducted in the Brazilian context<sup>(9)</sup>.

The scenario of health care in Brazil, marked by lack of approximation of professionals with research and low levels of participation of nurses in scientific activities<sup>(1)</sup>, corroborates the results of this study in which most of the professionals that develop and use EBP are nurses working in the academic context.

In this respect, the changes identified in the last few years are due to the action of nursing professors in the teaching-learning process, starting at the undergraduate level, stimulating greater research in search of new knowledge and applying the results to improve health care. Therefore, the greater number of professionals entering graduate activities, such as master's and doctoral programs and diverse forms of discussion on the theme, corroborate the results found<sup>(10)</sup>.

Regarding the employment of EBP in health care, the difficulties are found not only in the research for evidence but also in applying it in their work reality. The interlinking between professional expertise and health outcomes

needs to be broadly assessed by those who carry out the findings. The evidence cannot be applied to any type of situation, but in contexts similar to those in which the study was carried out. Hence, in order for care to be effective, nursing interventions must be validated for the context in which they will be applied<sup>(1,5,30)</sup>.

Thus, in face of the challenges encountered in the development and implementation of EBP in nursing, studies have found that nurses demonstrate high interest and conviction in assuming that EBP can improve clinical care and practice, associating this aspect with greater professional development<sup>(29)</sup>. However, they are more secure with more experienced professionals or with appropriate training which helps in the development and implementation of EBP in health care<sup>(31)</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this study demonstrate the shortage of research with higher levels of scientific evidence that can contribute to expanding the use of EBP in nursing. The most common methodology used in the nursing articles that employed EBP was literature reviews, with LE 5. Most were integrative and systematic reviews directed at healthcare and teaching practices, developed in the Southeast of Brazil, by nursing professors who have a doctoral degree as their highest qualification.

Thus, while the field of nursing has increased its efforts to advance evidence-based nursing in the Brazilian context, studies with greater methodological rigor must be conducted in order to ensure that nurses make better decisions based on scientific evidence of higher quality and improve the care provided.

This study also emphasizes the importance of training nurses in the healthcare context to search for, develop and use research in practical contexts in order to overcome the dichotomy between research and healthcare provision.

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