

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF UNDERGRADUATE NURSING STUDENTS¹

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The College of Nursing at Ribeirão Preto, University of São Paulo, Brazil has been projected as a national reference with special appeal for students, which motivated this study on the profile of the school's applicants. The population of this exploratory-descriptive study is composed of alumni from 1999 to 2003. The data collection was performed through the university's registration forms and the analysis through the quantitative method. Results show a decreasing number of applications from Ribeirão Preto, a predominance of young, female and single applicants; few of them were employed at the time. Regarding their educational background, the data show an increasing number of applicants coming from private schools, while the majority of them entered the university within two years after concluding secondary school. Some of the students temporarily abandoned the course or lost one or more semesters, while most of them graduated within the expected term.

DESCRIPTORS: nursing; students, nursing; statistical distributions

PERFIL SOCIO-DEMOGRÁFICO DEL ALUMNO DE PREGRADO EN ENFERMERÍA

La Escuela de Enfermería de Ribeirão Preto de la Universidad de São Paulo se ha considerado como referencia nacional, por ser un polo de atracción para alumnos, lo cual fue nuestra motivación para conocer el perfil de quienes buscan estudiar en esta escuela. Estudio exploratorio-descriptivo, cuya población fue compuesta por egresos de 1999 a 2003. Siendo utilizado el método cuantitativo para analizar los datos recolectados a través de un Formulario de Inscripción del Alumno Ingresante a la Universidad de São Paulo, en el momento de su matrícula. Los resultados se caracterizan por ser escasas personas oriundas de Ribeirão Preto, jóvenes, mujeres y solteros. Pocos trabajaban. Con relación a la enseñanza secundaria, la gran mayoría estudio en colegios particulares, quienes luego de concluir sus estudios ingresaron a la universidad dentro de los dos años posteriores a su salida del colegio. Algunos alumnos abandonaron por un tiempo la universidad o se retrazaron, sin embargo la gran mayoría terminó dentro del tiempo previsto.

DESCRIPTORES: enfermería; estudiantes de enfermería; distribuciones estadísticas

PERFIL SOCIODEMOGRÁFICO DO ALUNO DO CURSO DE GRADUAÇÃO EM ENFERMAGEM

A Escola de Enfermagem de Ribeirão Preto da Universidade de São Paulo tem ocupado posição de destaque e de referência nacional, configurando-se como pólo de atração para alunos, o que motivou conhecer o perfil dos que buscam essa escola. Este é um estudo de natureza exploratório-descritiva, cuja população foi composta pelos egressos de 1999 a 2003. Foi utilizado método quantitativo para análise dos dados que foram coletados através do Formulário de Cadastramento do Aluno Ingressante na Universidade de São Paulo, preenchido no ato da matrícula. Os resultados mostraram diminuição do número de ribeirãno-pretanos, predominância de jovens, mulheres e solteiros. Poucos exerciam atividade remunerada. Quanto ao ensino médio, os dados mostraram aumento da formação em escolas particulares, sendo que a maioria concluiu o colegial e ingressou na universidade até dois anos após o seu término. Alguns alunos trancaram a matrícula ou caíram de turma, mas a maioria se formou dentro do tempo previsto.

DESCRIPTORES: enfermagem; estudantes de enfermagem; distribuições estatísticas

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INTRODUCTION

In the restructuring of the Brazilian Health Ministry, the creation of the Secretary of Health Work and Education Management, in 2003, focused on Human Resources as a central issue in the development of the National Health Policy. It assumes, among other factors, a strategic role in intersectoral guidelines involving the development of a National Policy of Human Resources in Health (PNRHS)*.

According to Decree No 1, issued on March 11th 2004, the Secretary of Health Work and Education Management determines on the functioning of the Observatory Network of Human Resources in Health, defining themes for study by the different Work Stations. The knowledge produced by the University of São Paulo at Ribeirão Preto College of Nursing - EERP-USP and disseminated by its Observatory of Human Resources has been grouped in five thematic axes: Human Resource Policies in Nursing; Professional Nursing Organizations; Nursing Labor Market; Nursing Service and Care Management; and Knowledge Production, Education and Human Resource Training in Nursing, which this study is part of.

The health labor market has been undergoing important transformations, determined by economic, technological and social policies. These transformations demand reformulations of education devices, so that the schools' graduates attend to the new demands that are generated.

The mission of EERP-USP, a WHO Collaborating Centre for the Development of Nursing Research, specifically in its undergraduate programs, is to educate generalist nurses with high levels of technical-scientific and political competency, based on ethical and humanistic values.

Allied with the requirements of implementing the guiding principles of the Single Health System, in the teaching market, "EERP-USP stands out and constitutes a national reference point, because it has contributed with its history, experience and production, dialoguing with new institutional actors. In this position, the school intends to maintain its place as a reference for the teaching and job market, in order to face the competition in practical teaching areas and in the allocation of its graduates to jobs"⁽¹⁾.

This outstanding position has granted visibility to EERP-USP, which has turned into an attraction pole for students who intend to follow the nursing career.

This assertion can be verified through the candidate/place index in the last five college entry exams held by Fuvest, showing that the demand has exceeded the number of available places (80). In 2005, this index corresponded to 10.75, against 10.85 in 2004, 10.51 in 2003, 10.23 in 2002, 8.64 in 2001 and 14.01 candidates/place in 2000⁽²⁾.

These aspects and one of the authors being a graduate from this college in constant contact with other graduates aroused our interest in getting to know who these students are.

We found studies about the profile of nursing students in other regions⁽³⁻⁶⁾, one of which assessed the characterization of nursing students at USP's two Nursing Colleges⁽⁷⁾, another carried out in two schools from the Southeast⁽⁸⁾, and also research about the profile of graduates from other nursing courses⁽⁹⁻¹¹⁾. Specifically at the USP at Ribeirão Preto College of Nursing, two studies of its graduates between 1957 and 1990 were carried out, focusing on their permanence time on the job⁽¹²⁻¹³⁾. Moreover, the fact that, until now, this Unit does not have a database with information about the profile of its students and the professional life of its former students makes the analysis more difficult.

The objectives of this study were to identify the sociodemographic profile of undergraduate nursing students at EERP-USP and the average time they take to finish the course.

METHODOLOGY

We carried out an exploratory-descriptive study, which aims to observe, describe and explore aspects of a situation⁽¹⁴⁾, using the quantitative method for data analysis.

The study population was delimited as graduates from 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2003. The New Student Registration Form of the University of São Paulo, filled out when the students enroll, was used as a data collection instrument.

First, we asked the Dean of the USP at Ribeirão Preto College of Nursing for permission to carry out the study, through a letter. After the research had been formally accepted, the project was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee at this College, although this research worked with secondary data. The project was approved, as registered in Of. CEP-

* Ministério da Saúde, SGTES, August 2003 (mimeograph)

EERP/USP-007/2005. Next, we requested the forms for data collection, carried out in the first two weeks of January 2005, from the Undergraduate Secretary.

When we proposed a study on this theme, we considered the following defining aspects of the students' profile: gender, age, civil status, origin, paid work, secondary school and year of conclusion and obtained degree, time between the conclusion of secondary education and the entry into college and average time to conclude the undergraduate course.

The collected data were used to elaborate an initial general group and per class, using a Microsoft Excel database for data description and analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Every year, 80 students who passed the Fuvest entry exam are enrolled at the USP at Ribeirão Preto College of Nursing. However, the number of graduates is different, as some students put their enrollment on hold or do not pass the course. EERP-USP graduated 57 students in 1999; 83 in 2000; 77 in 2001; 77 in 2002; and 83 in 2003, totaling 377 students.

In this group of 377 students, 94.69% (357) came from cities in the State of São Paulo, 27.05% (102) of whom from Ribeirão Preto. Fourteen of the remaining 5.30% (20) came from the State of Minas Gerais, two from Goiás and four from Mato Grosso do Sul. These data are shown in a more detailed form in Table 1.

Table 1 - Distribution of students starting the course at EERP-USP, who participated in the study, according to year and city of origin. Ribeirão Preto, SP, 1999-2003

City	1999		2000		2001		2002		2003	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Ribeirão Preto	20	35,1	22	26,5	26	33,8	23	29,9	11	13,2
Other cities from São Paulo State	36	63,1	58	69,9	49	63,6	49	63,6	67	80,7
Other States	1	1,8	3	3,6	2	2,6	5	6,5	5	6,1
Total	57	100	83	100	77	100	77	100	83	100

In a study of students enrolled in the first year of the undergraduate course at EERP-USP, carried out in 1977⁽⁶⁾, a higher number of students from Ribeirão Preto was observed in the beginning, a percentage that decreased over time. In 1968, 71.9% of students lived with their family in Ribeirão Preto. This percentage amounted to 34.4% in 1971 and 54.5% in 1976.

Since 1993, the Social Communication and Press Service of the Ribeirão Preto Campus Government - ACSI-PCARP⁽¹⁵⁻¹⁶⁾ has been researching on the new students on campus who are invited to enroll through Fuvest's first call. In 1996, a decrease in the presence of students from Ribeirão Preto by about 1.25% since the start of the research appeared.

This study shows that the same change is occurring at EERP-USP, as the number of students from Ribeirão Preto decreased, representing 27.05% of the total number of students who graduated between 1999 and 2003. The percentage of students from Ribeirão Preto corresponded to 35.08% in 1999; 26.5% in 2000; 33.76% in 2001; 29.87% in 2002 and 13.25% in 2003.

In a study of nursing students from the first until the ninth course semester, carried out at Ceará State University⁽³⁾, it was observed that 85% of sample students came from the State of Ceará, and 11.5% from other Brazilian states. The same occurs at EERP-USP, where 94.69% of students who graduated between 1999 and 2003 came from the State of São Paulo. The authors also mention that most students still live with their parents or family, and that few students lived alone or in republics. This means that a small number of students left their city of residence to go to college, as opposed to what we found in our study.

When they entered the University, EERP-USP students' ages ranged from 16 to 45 years, with 92.04% (347) between 17 and 21 years, distributed as follows: 17 years - 52 students; 18 years - 116; 19 years - 101; 20 years - 55; 21 years - 23. The age of the remaining 5.83% (22) was as follows: 22 years - eight; 23 years - four; 24 years - three; and one student each for the ages of 16, 25, 26, 29, 32, 36 and 45. Eight students' age could not be identified. Table 2 shows age range data for the students on the day of their enrollment.

Table 2 - Distribution of students starting the course at EERP-USP, who participated in the study, according to age range on the day of enrollment. Ribeirão Preto, SP, 1999-2003

Age	n	%
16 -17 years	53	14,1
18-19 years	217	57,5
20-21 years	78	20,7
22-23 years	12	3,2
24-25 years	4	1,1
26 years or older	5	1,3
Not identified	8	2,1
Total	377	100

The author of the study from 1977⁽⁷⁾ observed a small number of nursing students over 23, and mentions the daytime and full-time course structure as a possible cause. This entails problems for working persons and the fact that the profession is probably chosen very early.

In 1998, a study of new students on the USP at Ribeirão Preto campus⁽¹⁵⁾ showed that 90% of them were up to 20 years old, and that average age was decreasing in comparison with earlier years.

At UECE⁽³⁾, most students taking the Nursing course in 1993 were between less than 20 and up to 25 years old. A study in the South of Brazil, carried out in 2004⁽¹⁶⁾, indicated that 88% of the interviewed students were between 17 and 28 years old. Another research in the Southeast, realized in 2006⁽⁸⁾, appointed a mean age of 21.58 years. Many authors consider the age between 18 and 20 years as the end of adolescence. This phase is beneficial for decision making, when the young people become legally capable of assuming job responsibilities.

These data coincide with our findings. The entry of young students, mostly between 17 and 21 years, may be due to the fact that it is a full-time course, which does not allow students to combine work and study.

The large majority of students, i.e. 94.42% (356) were female, against only 5.57% (21) male. Their share in the five years under study was: 8.77% in 1999; 3.61% in 2000; 2.59% in 2001 and 2002 and 10.84% in 2003, according to Table 3.

Table 3 – Distribution of students starting the course at EERP-USP, who participated in the study, according to gender, Ribeirão Preto, SP, 1999-2003

Gender	1999		2000		2001		2002		2003	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Female	52	91,2	80	96,4	75	97,4	75	97,4	74	89,2
Male	5	8,8	3	3,6	2	2,6	2	2,6	9	10,8
Total	57	100	83	100	77	100	77	100	83	100

In view of data showing that almost all nursing students were female, the study from 1977⁽⁷⁾ related this fact with the prejudice that exists about the image of the profession: "... this prejudice refers to the fact that, historically, the Nursing profession is synonymous with an exclusively female profession".

The research carried out by ACSI-PCARP showed that, from 1993 to 1999, an increasing number of women started to study at the USP at Ribeirão Preto, despite an almost equal division of

places between both genders in 2000. "The changes traditionally attributed to one gender, like in the case of nursing, show that there occurs a constant movement in young people's interest and that prejudices are broken, to the extent that the number of male students in this course rose from 3 to 10% in only two years"⁽¹⁵⁻¹⁶⁾.

The male gender's interest in the profession seems to show that conceptions about Nursing are going through transformations, leaving behind that of being an exclusively female profession, although this conception still predominates.

In 1955, the number of women finishing secondary education was higher than the number of men, although the number of students applying to EERP-USP in the next year was a mere 0.9% of this total. In the same year, 1,478 female students enrolled in the 33 existing nursing schools, representing 8% of the total number of 18,281 women enrolled in some higher education courses. Fifteen students registered for the professional habilitation exam at EERP-USP, 14 of whom were women and one man⁽¹⁷⁾. In comparison with the data obtained in this study, a change movement is perceived, even if slow, in conceptions about this profession. Even today, at EERP-USP, most nursing students are women and single. However, a growing number of male students choose the profession, and the competition to conquer a place in college has become increasingly evident.

As to civil status, 96.28% (363) of the students were single on the day of their enrollment, in line with data from the research realized in 1993⁽¹³⁾. In the remaining group, six were married, two divorced and six did not fill out this item on the questionnaire.

Data are similar to those of a study carried out in 1977⁽⁷⁾, in which practically all students were single. Again, the author mentions the course structure as an influence on the students' profile, because it demands full-time dedication and because, moreover, classes and training periods are unequally distributed across mornings and afternoons, causing difficulties for married persons or people who need to work.

Only 4.5% (17) of students had some kind of paid work, 41.17% (7) of whom worked as nursing technicians or aids. The remainder, i.e. 95.4% (360) did not have any kind of paid work.

In 1996, other authors⁽³⁾ observed that 84.5% (234) of the students did not have any paid work before they went to college, while 14.8% (41) exercised an

activity that could or could not be reconciled with the full-time nursing course.

In a study carried out in 1995⁽⁴⁾, it was found that 56.5% of students enrolled in 28 nursing schools from the State of São Paulo did not have any paid work, that 15.8% of the new students worked part-time, that is, up to 30 hours per week, against 19% who worked full-time, in shifts of more than 30 hours per week. Among working students, 58.8% belonged to different nursing categories (43.2% had technical training; 76.8% secondary education and 48.1% basic education). According to the authors of that study, "it seems that these persons attend the nursing course because they are members of other categories (attendants, aids and technicians), in the attempt to improve their professional activities and get acknowledgement for their profession, as these categories are little valued and their salary in the health sector is low".

As to the school where they finished secondary education, 35.54% (134) of the students studied in private schools; 39.25% (148) in public schools and 25.19% (95) of the questionnaires did not contain this information.

The data obtained through this study indicated that, over time, the percentage of new students who finished their secondary education at private schools has increased: 28.07% in 1999; 37.34% in 2000; 36.36% in 2001; 40.25% in 2002; and 33.73% in 2003. Consequently, the number of students from public schools has decreased: 52.63% in 1999; 39.75% in 2000; 41.55% in 2001; 31.16% in 2002 and 34.93% in 2003. These data are shown in Figure 1.

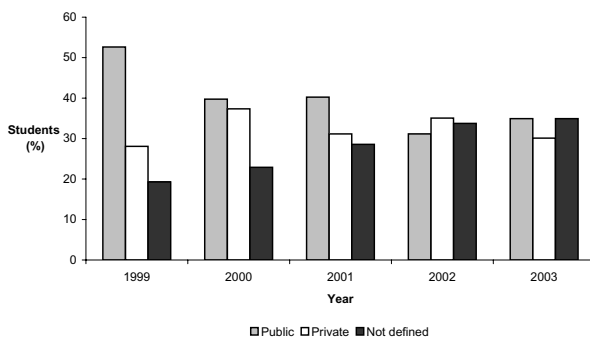


Figure 1 – Distribution of students starting the nursing course at EERP-USP, according to the school where they concluded secondary education. Ribeirão Preto, SP, 1999-2003

Due to the large number of questionnaires that did not contain this information, it cannot be

affirmed that most new students finished their secondary education at a private or public school, although there seems to be a tendency towards secondary education in private schools, mainly in recent years.

The research carried out at the USP at Ribeirão Preto⁽¹⁵⁻¹⁶⁾ since 1993 has shown that most new students at the University of São Paulo at Ribeirão Preto finished their secondary education in private schools. In 1996, this percentage corresponded to 75%; in 1997, 82%; in 1999, 74%; in 2000, 79%; in 2001, 75%; in 2002, 82%; in 2003, 76%; in 2004, 81%; in 2005, 80%. The research also shows that nursing is one of the courses with the largest number of students from public schools, together with chemistry and accounting.

As to the secondary degree the students obtained, 34.21% (129) of the questionnaires did not contain this information; 58.62% (221) finished secondary education; 1.59% (6) took the nursing technician course and 5.57% (21) attend professionalizing courses in other areas.

During the study period, some students got into college soon after they finished secondary education, i.e. 24.93% (94) out of 377 students; 38.46% (145) got into college after one year; 22.28% (84) after two years; 6.89% (26) after three years; 5.57% (21) between four and 26 years after they had finished secondary education; and 1.85% (7) of the questionnaires did not contain this information, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4 – Distribution of number of students, according to time in years between conclusion of high school and entry into college per year, EERP-USP, Ribeirão Preto, SP, 1999-2003

Gender	1999		2000		2001		2002		2003	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Female	52	91,2	80	96,4	75	97,4	75	97,4	74	89,2
Male	5	8,8	3	3,6	2	2,6	2	2,6	9	10,8
Total	57	100	83	100	77	100	77	100	83	100

In the study from 1977⁽⁷⁾, it was observed that, at first, the student got into college soon after they had finished secondary education. In 1971, there was a balance between the number of students entering after one and after two years (41% and 34%) and, in 1977, students getting into college two years after finishing secondary education predominated. The author mentions that this increased time between finishing secondary education and getting into college

may be due to the almost obligatory nature of preparatory courses for students, as a consequence of the increased demand for nursing schools in recent years.

In 1996, other authors⁽³⁾ showed that 174 (62.8%) out of a total group of 277 students got into college soon after they had finished secondary education, while 72 (26.0%) started after one year. These data differ from our study.

Among the 377 graduates between 1999 and 2003, 16.44% (62) put their enrollment on hold or lost one or more semesters. The latter continued the course or graduated with another class group.

Average graduation time ranged from four to 10 years. During the study period, most students, i.e. 305 (80.9%), finished the course within the established time – four years. In the remaining group, which put their enrollment on hold or lost one or more semesters, 38 finished in five years; 13 in six; eight in seven; one in eight; three in nine; one in 10 years. This information could not be obtained in eight questionnaires.

In 1955, a larger number of women than men finished secondary education, although the number of women entering the EERP-USP one year later corresponded to only 0.9% of this total. In the same year, 1,478 women registered at the 33 existing nursing schools, representing 8% of the total number of 18,281 women enrolled in higher education courses. In 1962, 15 candidates registered for the professional habilitation exam at EERP-USP, 14 of whom were women and one man⁽¹⁷⁾. In comparison with the information obtained through this study, a change movement is perceived, even if slow, in conceptions about this profession. Even today, most students taking the nursing course at EERP-USP are single women. However, an increasing number of male

students is observed, and the competition for college places has become increasingly evident.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Our interest in getting to know the profile of undergraduate students from the nursing course at EERP-USP led to the realization of this research. It could be verified that this college represents a reference point in nursing teaching, attracting students from the city itself and from other cities in the State of São Paulo, and even from other States, although the number of students living in Ribeirão Preto has been gradually decreasing.

Young, female and single students were predominant. A small number of students performed some kind of paid work before they got into college and almost half of those who worked were already active in the nursing area.

In the study period, data showed an upward tendency in the number of students from private schools. Moreover, in secondary education, it was observed that most students finished high school, and that some took professionalizing courses, including nursing technician courses. After finishing this stage, it took most students up to two years to get into college.

Although an earlier study was carried out in 1977 about the profile of this college's graduates⁽⁷⁾, we suggest the realization of other studies in shorter intervals so as to assess possible changes.

For the sake of future comparative studies, it would be very useful if EERP-USP maintained a computerized register, covering broader aspects of nursing graduates.

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