

## Characterization of references in dissertations and theses from the graduate programs in Minas Gerais

*Caracterização dos referenciais das dissertações e teses dos programas mineiros de pós-graduação*

*Caracterización de las referencias de las disertaciones y tesis de los programas de posgrado de Minas Gerais*

### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To characterize the theoretical/methodological references of theses/dissertations with qualitative and mixed approach of Postgraduate Programs in Nursing at Federal Universities in Minas Gerais. **Method:** Descriptive, retrospective and documentary study, carried out by accessing digital libraries of the programs. The sample consisted of 888 dissertations and 164 theses between 1996 and 2019. Data collected by authorial instrument and analyzed by descriptive statistics. **Results:** Out of the 888 dissertations, 503 (56.64%) quantitative design, 345 (38.86%) qualitative, and 40 (4.5%) mixed/quali-quant. Out of the 164 theses, 92 (56.10%) quantitative design, 64 (39.02%) qualitative and 8 (4.88%) mixed/quali-quant. Predominant references: Thematic and Content Analysis/Bardin/Minayo; Phenomenology; Case study; Theory of Social Representations/Critical Discourse Analysis; Hermeneutics-Dialectic; Comprehensive Analysis; Comprehensive Sociology of Everyday Life, Ethnography, Structural Analysis of Narration and Grounded Theory. **Conclusion:** These references contribute to the translation of knowledge and quality of nursing care.

**Descriptors:** Nursing; Nursing Research; Study Characteristics; Health Graduate Programs; Education, Nursing, Graduate.

### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Caracterizar os referenciais teórico/metodológico das dissertações/teses com abordagem qualitativa e mista, dos Programas de Pós-graduação *Stricto sensu* em Enfermagem públicos mineiros. **Método:** Descritivo, retrospectivo e documental, com acesso às bibliotecas digitais dos Programas. Identificou-se 888 dissertações e 164 teses no período de 1996 a 2019. Dados coletados por instrumento autorial e analisados pela estatística descritiva. **Resultados:** Das 888 dissertações, 503 (56,64%) delineamento quantitativo, 345 (38,86%) qualitativo e 40 (4,5%) misto/quali-quant. Das 164 teses, 92(56,10%) delineamento quantitativo, 64 (39,02%) qualitativo e 8 (4,88%) misto/quali-quant. Referenciais predominantes: Análise temática e de Conteúdo/Bardin/Minayo; Fenomenologia; Estudo de Caso; Teoria das Representações Sociais/Análise Crítica do Discurso; Hermenêutica-Dialética; Análise Compreensiva; Sociologia Compreensiva do Cotidiano, Etnografia, Análise Estrutural da Narração e Teoria Fundamentada nos Dados. **Conclusão:** Esses referenciais contribuem para translação do conhecimento e qualidade do cuidado de Enfermagem.

**Descritores:** Enfermagem; Pesquisa em Enfermagem; Características dos Estudos; Programas de Pós-graduação em Saúde; Educação de Pós-graduação em Enfermagem.

### RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** Caracterizar los referentes teóricos/metodológicos de las disertaciones/tesis con enfoque cualitativo y mixto, de programas de posgrado *Stricto sensu* en enfermería, de universidades públicas de Minas Gerais. **Método:** Descritivo, retrospectivo y documental, con acceso a las bibliotecas digitales de los programas. Fueron identificadas 888 disertaciones y 164 tesis, desde 1996 hasta 2019. Datos recogidos mediante instrumento autorial y analizados por estadística descriptiva. **Resultados:** De las 888 disertaciones, 503 (56,64%) presentaron diseño cuantitativo; 345 (38,86%) cualitativo y 40 (4,5%) mixto. De las 164 tesis, 92 (56,10%) con diseño cuantitativo; 64 (39,02%) cualitativo y 8 (4,88%) mixto. Referencias predominantes: Análisis Temático y de Contenido/Bardin/Minayo; Fenomenología; Estudio de caso; Teoría de las Representaciones Sociales/Análisis Crítico del Discurso; Hermenêutica-Dialética; Análisis comprensivo; Sociología Comprensiva de lo Cotidiano, Etnografía, Análisis Estructural de la Narración y Teoría Fundamentada en Datos. **Conclusión:** Estos referentes contribuyen a la traslación del conocimiento y calidad del cuidado de enfermería.

**Descritores:** Enfermería; Investigación en Enfermería; Características del Estudio; Programas de Posgrado en Salud; Educación de Posgrado en Enfermería.

Munyra Rocha Silva Assunção<sup>1</sup>

[0000-0002-0998-3125](mailto:0000-0002-0998-3125)

Bianca de Moura Peloso-Carvalho<sup>1</sup>

[0000-0001-5336-2249](mailto:0000-0001-5336-2249)

Nathália Gianini Nery<sup>1</sup>

[0000-0002-6148-0613](mailto:0000-0002-6148-0613)

Bianca Aparecida Brito da Silva<sup>1</sup>

[0000-0001-8954-7616](mailto:0000-0001-8954-7616)

Eliza Maria Rezende Dázio<sup>1</sup>

[0000-0001-9216-6283](mailto:0000-0001-9216-6283)

Silvana Maria Coelho Leite Fava<sup>1</sup>

[0000-0003-3186-9596](mailto:0000-0003-3186-9596)

<sup>1</sup> Universidade Federal de Alfenas, MG, Brasil.

**Corresponding author:**

Munyra Rocha Silva Assunção

**E-mail:** [munyrarsilva@hotmail.com](mailto:munyrarsilva@hotmail.com)

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## INTRODUCTION

Nursing is a field of scientific, technological and innovative knowledge and a social practice committed to public health care policies. As a science, it makes connections with several fields of knowledge, aiming at the potentialities for the (re) construction of knowledge to attend the diversities that permeate the knowledge and the practices of the profession<sup>(1)</sup>.

In this context, the production of knowledge in the Nursing area has been carried out, mainly by the *Stricto sensu* Postgraduate Programs, which has contributed to innovative practices, contextualized and congruent with public policies, people's needs and the visibility of the area on the national and international scene<sup>(2)</sup>.

The construction of knowledge has been based on quantitative, qualitative, quanti-qualitative and mixed approaches and on theoretical and methodological references of health, human and social sciences, among others, for the investigation of its objects of study, as well as to promote the translation of knowledge, the dissemination and use of research results<sup>(3)</sup>. In this study we chose to characterize the theoretical/methodological references of the research with qualitative and mixed approach.

Research with a qualitative approach begins with assumptions and the use of theoretical/interpretative/reflexive structures that present the study of research problems, with the purpose of apprehending the meanings that the person attributes to a social or human problem, as well as understanding multiple subjective views. For the construction of knowledge, it demands a complex reasoning, permeated between the inductive and deductive, and the researcher is considered a key instrument, through the social, historical and political environment/context of the research participants. Therefore, the researcher is required to provide theoretical support, methodological rigor and creativity<sup>(4)</sup>.

The mixed method/Quali-Quanti design has achieved its visibility in recent years, as it allows the complementarity of qualitative research to quantitative research and vice versa. The association of data widens the focus of discussion of the study, providing the understanding of the whole, with its many facets existing, presenting greater clarity of results<sup>(5)</sup>.

The interest in developing this study is based on our approach to the methodological references learned in the discipline of Methodological Foundations of the Care Process and the Research of a postgraduate Program *Stricto sensu* in Nursing, to understand the directions of research in Nursing and its interfaces with other knowledge.

The decision was made to cut out the scientific production of Minas Gerais, in view of the partnership between the Postgraduate Programs *Stricto sensu* in Nursing of federal universities. In this context, the production of the *Stricto Sensu* Post-graduation Programs of the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), the Federal University of Triângulo Mineiro (UFTM), Juiz de Fora (UFJF), the Federal University of São João Del Rei (UFSJ) and the Federal University of Alfenas (UNIFAL-MG) was sought, with the objective of characterizing the theoretical/methodological references adopted in theses and dissertations with qualitative and mixed approaches of the *Stricto sensu* Postgraduate Programs in Nursing of the Federal Universities of Minas Gerais.

## METHOD

It is a documental, descriptive and retrospective study. The documentary study consists of identifying, verifying and assessing the documents in order to obtain relevant data. An objective reflection is extracted from the original source, enabling the location, identification, organization and evaluation of the information included in the document, as well as the contextualization of the facts at certain times<sup>(6)</sup>.

The sample consisted of the theses and dissertations available in the bank of theses and dissertations of the universities, without temporal cut-off.

For the data collection an instrument was elaborated with the following data: number of dissertation and thesis defenses, year of defense, program, concentration area, research lines, theoretical/methodological references. The data were collected in November and December 2019. Initially, the abstract and, when necessary, the dissertation and thesis were read in full, searching for information in order to meet the objectives of the study. The data were organized in a spreadsheet built in the Microsoft Excel 2016 Program and analyzed by means of descriptive statistics.

## RESULTS and DISCUSSION

A total of 1239 theses and dissertations from the *Stricto sensu* Postgraduate Programs *Stricto sensu* in Nursing of the Federal Universities of Minas Gerais were raised, of which 1064 dissertations and 175 theses, distributed in the following programs: 176 dissertations and 23 theses (UFTM); 128 dissertations (UFJF); 620

dissertations and 152 theses (UFMG); 56 dissertations (UFSJ) and 84 dissertations (UNIFAL-MG). However, 176 dissertations (16.54%) and 11 theses (6.29%) were not available in the Programs pages. Thus, 888 dissertations and 164 theses were part of this study, totaling a sample of 1052, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1** - Distribution of dissertations and thesis of the *Stricto sensu* Postgraduate Programs in Nursing, of the Federal Universities of Minas Gerais, Alfenas, 2019

Variables	Number of defenses	Not available on the Program page	Analyzed	UFTM	UFJF	UFMG	UFSJ	UNIFAL
Dissertations	1064	176	888	176	128	620	56	84
Theses	175	11	164	23	-	152	-	-
<b>Total</b>	1239	187	1052	199	128	772	56	84

Source: Authors.

It was found that in the period 1996 to 2019 1064 dissertations were defended and in the period 2008 to 2019 175 theses were defended.

Regarding the methodological approach, there was a predominance of quantitative design

for both dissertations and theses, and the scarcity of study with mixed/Quali-Quanti method, according to Table 2.

**Table 2** - Distribution of dissertations and theses according to the methodological approach of the *Stricto sensu* Post-graduate Nursing Programs of the Federal Universities of Minas Gerais, Alfenas, 2019

Methodological Approach	Dissertations		Theses	
	N	%	n	%
Quantitative	503	56.64	92	56.10
Qualitative	345	38.86	64	39.02
Mixed/Quali-Quanti	40	4.5	8	4.88

Source: Authors.

Regarding the theoretical/methodological references adopted in the dissertations and theses with qualitative and mixed approach, 125

references were used. The most used references in the dissertations and theses, according to the Programs, are presented in Chart 1.

**Chart 1** - Distribution of the most used theoretical-methodological references in the dissertations and thesis of the *Stricto sensu* Nursing Post-graduation Programs of the Federal Universities of Minas Gerais, Alfenas, 2019

Theoretical-Methodological Referentials	Total number (theoretical and methodological)	UFMG	UFTM	UFJF	UFSJ	UNIFAL
Case study	56	X	X	X	X	X
Thematic or Content Analysis Bardin or Minayo	210	X	X	X	X	X
Theory of Social Representations	54	X	X	X		X
Critical Discourse Analysis	20	X		X		
Martin Heidegger Phenomenology or Phenomenology	68	X	X	X	X	X
Ethnography	24	X	X	X		X
Hermeneutics-Dialectics or Dialectics	33	X	X	X		X

(Continues)

**Chart 1** - Distribution of the most used theoretical-methodological references in the dissertations and thesis of the *Stricto sensu* Nursing Post-graduation Programs of the Federal Universities of Minas Gerais, Alfenas, 2019

Theoretical-Methodological Referentials	Total number (theoretical and methodological)	UFMG	UFTM	UFJF	UFSJ	UNIFAL
Comprehensive Analysis	28	X		X		
Theory Based on Data	18	X		X	X	X
Structural Analysis of Narration	17	X		X		
Comprehensive Sociology of Daily Life and/or Maffesoli's Comprehensive Sociology of Daily Life	33	X		X	X	

Source: Authors.

Other theoretical/methodological references also deserve mention, such as Paulo Freire's critical and liberating Education, Vigotski's Cultural History, Convergent Assistential Research (CAR) and Nursing Theories, especially Dorothea Orem's Self-Care Theory and Madeleine Leininger's Cultural Diversity Theory.

The data indicates that researchers, for the production of knowledge in the Nursing Area, have sought an interdisciplinary integration with the contributions of the Social Sciences, Anthropology and Psychology, which has contributed to achieve a more complex view of the human being and the phenomena of illness, life and death.

According to data from the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES), currently 79 *Stricto sensu* Postgraduate Nursing Programs are offered, and the Programs of the Federal Universities of Minas Gerais represent 6.3% of these programs with the offer of eight courses.

The *Stricto sensu* Nursing Postgraduate Program at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG) School of Nursing offers both Master's and Doctorate academic courses. The Master's course has the concentration area "Health and Nursing", with three lines of research: "Health Care and Nursing", "Management and Education in Health and Nursing" and "Epidemiology, Policies and Practices in Population Health". The PhD course in Nursing offers three lines of research: "Health Care and Nursing", "Health Management and Education and Nursing" and "Epidemiology, Policies and Practices in Population Health".

The *Stricto sensu* Postgraduate Program in Health Care at the Federal University of the Triângulo Mineiro (UFTM) offers the academic Master's and Doctorate courses, with a concentration area in "Health and Nursing" and

the research lines "Population Health Care" and "Work in Health and Nursing"

The *Stricto sensu* Postgraduate Program at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora (UFJF) offers the Master's Degree in Nursing with the concentration area "Health Care and Nursing" with the research lines: "Theoretical, Political and Cultural Foundations of Health Care and Nursing" and "Technology and Communication in Health Care and Nursing".

The *Stricto sensu* Post-Graduate Program in Nursing of the Federal University of Alfenas (UNIFAL-MG), with a concentration area, "Nursing", offers two lines of research: "Care Process in Nursing" and "Management in Health Services and Education". It is worth mentioning that the doctorate course started in December 2020.

The Postgraduate Academic Master in Nursing Program of the Federal University of São João Del-Rei (UFSJ), with area of concentration, "Nursing", offers two lines of research: "Management, Organization and Evaluation in Health and Nursing" and "The Process of Care in Health and Nursing".

Dissertations and theses are a partial requirement for the granting of a master's and doctor's degree. The graduates of these programs must be capable of producing and disseminating knowledge that enhances the quality of life in society; of diversifying the ideals, of affecting the exercise of citizenship for the qualification of care and for the reflections of the essence of Nursing<sup>(7)</sup>.

As for the approach, the predominance of quantitative studies was verified, a result similar to that found in a study that aimed at analyzing the production of knowledge of the Nursing Postgraduate Program of the State University of Campinas and the dissemination of knowledge in scientific journals<sup>(8)</sup>.

Divergent result was found in a study<sup>(7)</sup> which aimed to analyze the thematic and methodological trend of the dissertations and thesis of the Nursing Postgraduate Program of the Federal University of Paraíba, by noting the predominance of studies with qualitative approach.

Corroborates with this result, a study with the objective of characterizing the dissertations and theses available in the Catalogue of Theses and Dissertations (CEPEn) of the Brazilian Nursing Association (ABEn), regarding the path taken by the Brazilian Nursing in the field of teaching, research, management and assistance practice. The authors reiterate that Nursing has been concerned in knowing the human being in its singularity and complexity, and the methodological approach allows this understanding<sup>(9)</sup>.

It was found in this study that the Case Study, Content or Thematic Analysis and Phenomenology were the theoretical/methodological references predominantly employed by researchers of the Postgraduate Programs of Minas Gerais.

Although Nursing Theories are not among the most adopted references by researchers, there has been an increasing use in dissertations and theses, which corroborates with the findings of this study<sup>(7)</sup>.

There is a vast possibility of methodological references, and the option of choice by the researcher, according to the object of study, is part of the scientific work. Thus, this choice must take into account the coherence with the objective, the problem, the field to be investigated and the theoretical reference, which contributes to the quality of production<sup>(10)</sup>.

The methodological option for the content and thematic analysis of Bardin and Minayo were predominant in this study, as well as found in another study<sup>(11)</sup>.

The content analysis consists of a set of communication analysis techniques aiming to obtain, by systematic and objective procedures of description of the content of the messages, indicators, quantitative or not, that allow the inference of knowledge related to the conditions of production/reception of these messages. The analysis of content consists of the unit of meaning that naturally appears in the analyzed text, from a statement about a certain subject, that is, to reveal the critical nature of the message so that it

can be understood about another reality than that which is present in it<sup>(12)</sup>.

Phenomenology allows a qualitative and interpretative strategy, aiming at intersubjective, comprehensive and portrayed knowledge, based on life experience to understand a phenomenon<sup>(13)</sup>. The use of this reference has been characterized by a great diversity of scope, reflected in different approaches and interpretations.

Martin Heidegger, one of the authors most used in the study of phenomenology, developed his approach, through hermeneutic phenomenology, helping in the construction and strengthening of theoretical assumptions, contributing to the scientific potentialities. He argues that modern science needs the exercise of critical reflection, for the understanding of human phenomena<sup>(13)</sup>.

The case study is often situated within the qualitative paradigm. It is a structured research method, and its application can be in different circumstances, which contributes in the field of knowledge both to individual and group phenomena, being endowed with a set of logical procedures and techniques that allow the operationalization and relationship between causes and phenomena<sup>(14)</sup>. The case study has been used to answer complex health questions, and the researcher needs an accurate and secure posture of the method and attention to all elements of the case study to promote authenticity, robustness and good methodological quality<sup>(15)</sup>.

The studies in the area of nursing that used as theoretical-methodological reference the thoughts of Maffesoli have increased considerably, bringing important contributions, since the 90's until today. This reference contributes to the performance of the nursing team, showing different ways in the dimension of care, be it in the care or scientific field, from the daily life of the people, looking for their way of living, re-signifying the care that goes beyond the technique, making possible changes in the way of looking, so that it can enter in tune with the diverse situations of living and living in society, for an affective and effective care<sup>(16)</sup>.

The reference of the Theory of Social Representations allows the development of research with valorization of the subjectivity of people and also for the applicability in nursing care<sup>(17)</sup>. It also allows the researcher to

understand the attitudes, behaviors and meanings shared by a certain social group, originating more specific nursing interventions and, consequently, more efficient, because they respect the characteristics of each group<sup>(17)</sup>.

The use of this reference, by the Postgraduate Programs of Minas Gerais, is consistent with the results of a study<sup>(7)</sup> that, when analyzing the theoretical and methodological framework of theses and dissertations, found that, out of a total of 46 dissertations and theses analyzed, 32.6% used the Theory of Social Representations as a theoretical framework, which represented the second most adopted framework by the Nursing Postgraduate Program of the Federal University of Paraíba. It is observed, therefore, an alignment in the theoretical option, what points as an important perspective of partnerships for the development of researches between programs of distinct regions.

Hermeneutics-Dialectics aims at understanding and criticizing reality through the understanding of texts, historical facts and daily life, allowing the identification of differences, controversies and the rupture of meaning<sup>(4)</sup>. It uses the communication of daily life and common sense, based on cultural experience, experiences, shared meanings and symbols<sup>(4)</sup>. Furthermore, it provides the foundations for understanding the meaning of communication, through intersubjectivity, representing the necessary movement for the production of rationality, in relation to complex social processes, that is, it aims to apprehend the empirical social practice of individuals who make up society<sup>(4)</sup>.

It was found that the reference of Hermeneutics-Dialectics has been used in dissertations and thesis by most programs, bringing analysis that made it possible to understand the inter-subjectivity, experiences and meanings of people within a complex, unpredictable and changing society. They have perceived the contributions of this reference to Nursing, since it allows the identification of contradictions, convergences and divergences, paying attention to and guiding the nurse in his/her praxis<sup>(18)</sup>.

Comprehensive Sociology seeks to understand the unexpected, values the casual, the banal, the incomplete presentations of life and the subjective actions of people in their relationship environments. It refers to the notion of spatiality, in which the world is permeated by

conflicts, hatred and loves, resulting in a dynamic place that can be called sociality. By offering a different vision of human relations, the present reference contributes to scientific research<sup>(19)</sup>, especially in the area of Nursing, which is essential to understand how each person experiences the health-disease process.

Comprehensive Analysis is a reference that uses the analytical procedure; it requires that the investigator has the perception as a free understanding subject. It encourages the interaction of elements and connections in its exercise, being as constituent parts of the multidimensional universe that integrate the whole relative to the subject<sup>(20)</sup>. The researcher must reproduce the subjects' narrative, theoretical knowledge and also expand his own horizon in order to interpret and be interpreted<sup>(20)</sup>.

The structural analysis of the narration is described by Demazière and Dubar<sup>(21)</sup>. According to the authors, the interview is an opportunity for reflection for the interviewee, which results in the link with the interviewer, in order to allow the interviewee to present his analysis of the facts, justifications and values about them and the interviewer to evaluate, during the interviews, the categories of representations<sup>(21)</sup>.

The Ethnographic method has been used in the dissertations/theses to understand the symbolic aspects of social life and is based on the idea that human behaviors can only be understood within the socio-cultural context<sup>(22)</sup>. Thus, ethnography enables a dialogue between the researcher and the researched, thus allowing a mutual exchange of knowledge and experiences, which makes it important for Nursing to understand, from the person's perspective, their way of thinking and acting and their experiences. A similar result was found in a study in the area of Nursing<sup>(23)</sup> which points to the importance of using this reference in scientific researches.

Data Based Theory (DBT) aims at understanding the experiences and interactions of people inserted in a given social context, seeking to highlight the strategies developed in face of these lived situations. The use of DBT in research in nursing shows that the referential is in consonance with the professional practice of the nurse, because this assumes a crucial and fundamental role in the articulation of relations/interactions in the care and organizational scope and propitiates an

intersection between patient/family/professional/community, with a view to finding solutions and alternatives for the challenges and limitations that emerge in their praxis<sup>(24)</sup>.

In accordance with the findings of this study, it was found that, out of a total of 274 dissertations, DBT predominated among the methodological references used by students of Post-graduate Nursing at the State University of Campinas, with a percentage of 35%<sup>(8)</sup>, which demonstrates the relevance of this reference for research in nursing.

In relation to international production, there is a scarcity of studies that aim to identify the theoretical and methodological references used by the Postgraduate Nursing Programs. A study carried out among the main magazines in Mexico with the objective of describing the themes and methodological characteristics of nursing publications, showed that of the 244 articles published, 84% did not use nursing theories as a reference to guide the research. In relation to the studies of qualitative approach (n=38), the most used references were Phenomenology (35.55%), DBT (19.3%) and Ethnography (6.4%)<sup>(25)</sup>.

Thus, the analysis of theoretical/methodological references for the construction of knowledge by the postgraduate course in Minas Gerais points to the diversity of options that researchers have appropriated for the understanding of different phenomena and contexts related to the process of health-disease and care, contributing to the improvement of nursing practice.

## CONCLUSION

The research carried out had the intention of offering the reader the vision of an important part of the knowledge construction of the Postgraduate Programs *Stricto sensu* in Nursing about the theoretical/methodological references of the dissertations and thesis with qualitative and mixed approach.

The analysis of the dissertations and thesis of the federal *Stricto sensu* post-graduate programs in Nursing presents data that point to the predominance of studies with a quantitative approach and the incipency in mixed and Quali-Quanti studies.

Among the theoretical/methodological references, the predominance of Content and

Thematic Analysis of Bardin and Minayo was observed, followed by the Case Study and Phenomenology.

In this work, the importance of the exchange of experiences and partnerships among the qualitative researchers of the five *Stricto sensu* Nursing Postgraduate Programs is considered, for the offer of shared disciplines and research projects, in order to expand the possibilities in the use of theoretical/methodological references for the construction and dissemination of knowledge, as well as for the advancement of the science of Nursing.

In this way, these references have the potential to achieve the understanding of how people understand their everyday universes, providing the researcher with a direction on how to approach individual and social contexts, in order to contribute to the translation of knowledge and to the quality of nursing care.

The difficulty in accessing all the dissertations and theses produced by the Postgraduate Programs in the established time frame may be considered a limitation of the study.

The abstracts of some theses and dissertations showed the incompleteness of the data related to the theoretical/methodological references, which points to the need for a careful evaluation of the final version of the research report.

It is suggested that studies be carried out, among other *Stricto sensu* Postgraduate Programs in Nursing to know an important part of the Brazilian production on the theoretical/methodological references of studies with qualitative and mixed approaches.

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#### Editores Responsáveis:

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