

ANALYSIS OF THE METHODOLOGICAL REFERENTIAL OF DISSERTATIONS BY CONSOLIDATED CRITERIA FOR A REPORTING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

Analyzing the content described in the methodological design of the nursing master degree qualitative dissertations. A narrative review held from the portal of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Level Personnel. The study design analysis was based on the domain two of instrument for the qualitative research. 683 dissertations were selected. The writing of the works did not meet completely the criteria established by the instrument. The main gaps are related to the description of the sample and the non-participants, to the presence of non-participants during the data collection, to the need of repeating the interviews, to the description of the criteria of data saturation, to the return of the transcription of the interviews to the participants. On the other hand, there is the achievement of the dissertations of the methodological guidance description in its entirety, and there is the achievement in its majority of the approaching methods, of the size of the sample in the configuration and in the data collection. It is important to consider the use of these guides in the elaboration, in the development and in the writing of scientific works in order to contribute for the methodological.

Keywords: Qualitative research. Check List. Data accuracy. Evaluation. Manuals and guidelines for the research management.

INTRODUCTION

Nursing has been a health field with great growth in terms of research and qualification and research is linked to the production of knowledge⁽¹⁾. The growing production of this knowledge is related to the *Lato Sensu* specializations and the *Stricto Sensu* Postgraduate courses (PG)^(1,2).

Research with a qualitative approach has been gaining notoriety within PG, since it allows an interpretative view of subjectivist reality, in which man is the focus of interest, within his universe of reasons and emotions. Thus, research with such an approach has as objective to interpret phenomena, meanings and apprehend the point of view of the subject studied, which allows a comprehensive view of the relationships established between groups of individuals with common experiences, obtained from their interactions and experiences in non-quantifiable and non-reductionist terms⁽³⁻⁵⁾. In order to achieve these objectives, it is essential that the qualitative researcher has the following characteristics: imagination, technical ability, idea and great sensitivity⁽³⁾.

It is necessary that the qualitative research is written and analyzed in detail and, for this, it requires the accomplishment of refinement and evaluation steps, based on levels of strong evidence, in order to provide greater trustworthiness of what is being investigated, since this research type of approach points to a superficial investigative model, which shows difficulties in an immediate interpretation^(1,2).

In compliance with methodological rigor, there are guides in the literature such as Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ), Critical appraisal skills program (CASP), Enhancing Transparency in Reporting the Synthesis of Qualitative Research (ENTREQ), which allow a thorough analysis and guarantee levels of strong evidence. COREQ is divided into 3 domains with 32 items: domain 1, research team and reflexivity; domain 2, study design; domain 3: analysis and findings, and it was set up in Australia to develop a checklist for explicit and comprehensive qualitative studies reports⁽⁶⁾. It was published in 2007 but it is not validated or translated yet into Brazil, but many national and international journals use it as a way of evaluating qualitative manuscripts. In addition, it is

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worth noting that there is a shortage of updated studies that evaluate the levels of evidence from qualitative studies.

In view of the above, the objective of the study was to analyze the content described in the methodological design of academic master's dissertations in nursing, based on COREQ's critical review criteria.

METHODOLOGY

This is a narrative study about the methodological content of the dissertations of the Graduate Programs in Nursing in compliance with the activities of the discipline Methodological foundations of the qualitative research of a Graduate Program in Nursing of a public university of Minas Gerais.

Narrative review is appropriate to describe and to discuss a subject from a theoretical or contextual perspective⁽⁷⁾. Although this type of review does not require a rigorous methodology for the search for references or selection and evaluation criteria, it was decided to cite the database, the eligibility criteria and the temporal cut-off for the reliability of the data⁽⁸⁾.

The data collection was carried out from October to December 2016, based on consultation on the Portal of the Coordination of Improvement of Higher Level Personnel (CAPES) available in the Bank of

theses and dissertations. It was established as inclusion criteria: academic master's dissertations from 2013 to 2016, qualitative research, and as exclusion criteria: dissertations with quantitative approaches, case studies, experience reports, review studies, professional master's dissertations, documentary analysis and methodological studies. The temporal cut is due to the availability of the dissertations on the portal from the year 2013.

The researchers selected the studies initially by reading the abstracts, and then the methodology was read. In total, 831,084 theses and dissertations were found. From this total, 3,592 contemplated the nursing area, from which 2,774 were dissertations and 1,062 with a qualitative approach. After applying the inclusion criteria, the final sample consisted of 683 dissertations, which were analyzed through domain 2 of COREQ, which addresses aspects related to the design of the study, in order to answer the objective of this work.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the 683 dissertations selected, most were from 2013 (32.50%), followed by 2014 (32.35%), 2015 (31.33%) and 2016 (3.8%). The results found are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Information related to the methodological aspects present in the Master's Dissertations in Nursing, with a qualitative approach, according to COREQ. Brazil, 2017. (n = 683)

DOMAIN 2 CRITERIA	YES	NO	PARTIAL
STUDY DESIGN	%	%	%
Methodological guidance	100	0	0
Sampling	18,44	77,30	4,24
Method of approach	81,11	6,14	12,73
Sample size	95,90	3,36	0,58
Non-participation	12,44	75,84	11,27
Definition of data collection	93,99	2,34	3,51
Presence of non-participants	14,78	83,60	1,17
Sample description	52,85	31,62	15,08
Interview guide	52,12	5,85	41,72
Repeat interviews	12,73	86,53	0,58
The research used recording	77,15	11,71	11,12
Field Notes	30,30	66,32	3,36
Duration	38,65	59,44	1,90
Data Saturation	25,18	68,52	6,29
Transcripts were returned to participants	3,80	95,75	0,44

The description of the type of methodological orientation used in qualitative research provides a universal language and enables the strengthening of the scientific basis, so it is very importance that it is reported⁽⁹⁾. Thus, we observed that the authors are attentive with respect to this question, since all the studies analyzed presented methodological orientation, and in 35.11% of them the authors opted for content analysis.

The results are presented in the form of words, then it is sought to classify them in themes or categories that make possible the understanding of what is behind the speeches, thus guaranteeing the elimination of possible uncertainties, as well as the enrichment of the data collected⁽¹⁰⁾.

Regarding the size of the sample, it was observed that in 18.44% the authors bothered to inform this

data. The sampling technique for selection of participants should be clarified in advance because it can interfere directly in the quality of the information, from which it will be possible to construct the analysis and to reach a broader understanding of the problem outlined, and its non-existence may affect the estimate of the sample size⁽¹¹⁾.

It is also emphasized that the fulfillment of this precept corresponds to an attitude of ethical dimension that helps to show the rigor employed in a scientific investigation⁽¹²⁾. Although the authors emphasized the relevance of sampling, it was found that most of the studies (77.30%) did not present this information.

It was found that 81.11% of the studies presented the method of approach of the participants, which allows readers to know how the contacts between researchers and participants were established, since this provides significant elements for the reading and subsequent interpretation of the testimonies as well as for the understanding of the universe investigated^(6,12).

The definition of the size of the sample of participants was mentioned by the majority (95.90%) of the authors and this data has great relevance, since it allows to evaluate the diversity of perspectives included⁽⁶⁾.

It is also necessary for research to provide information on the number of people who refused to participate in the study, as well as on the reasons that led them to adopt such an initiative, because it makes it possible to verify the applicability of the principles of bioethics in order to ensure the rights of the participants, as recommended by Resolution 466 of 12/12/2012 of the National Health Council⁽¹³⁾. Although this data is relevant, it was observed that 12.44% of the researchers brought this complete information, with some mentioning the number of participants who refused or abandoned the research, but did not justify the reason.

Concerning the information about the data collection sites, it has been recommended that they can provide significant elements for reading and interpreting the statements⁽⁶⁾. Interviews conducted in workplaces often lead to some unpleasant situations that are difficult to solve, such as: open schedules to remember appointments, phones ringing, people talking aloud and walking in adjoining rooms can undermine the line of reasoning participants, generate feelings of anxiety and thus, interrupt the free flow of ideas⁽¹²⁾.

Therefore, in order to guarantee more productive

and reliable results, it is recommended that the data is collected at the interviewees' homes, once they feel more comfortable in an environment free of interruptions, in which the conversations will flow more calmly in a way that favors the freedom to express ideas and less concern with time⁽¹²⁾. It was found that this was a concern of the authors, considering that 93.99% of the studies analyzed used the domicile of the participants.

The presence of non-participants during interviews or focus groups should be reported because, in addition to intimidating participants, it may affect the opinions that will be expressed by them during data collection⁽⁶⁾. Although relevant, it was observed that only 14.78% of the researchers explained this information.

The description of the sample is a relevant data because it allows the readers to know the sociodemographic characterization of the participants^(6,12). However, the data revealed that this information was mentioned in 52.85% of the studies, which points to an important knowledge gap inherent in qualitative research.

As far as data collection is concerned, it corresponds to a crucial step in a survey, so it is necessary to have it done judiciously. This step involves the use of instruments, the method of collection and the repetition of interviews, when necessary⁽¹⁴⁾.

The use of instruments for data collection makes it possible to acquire the answers to be sought, and without a guideline, there is a risk that researchers will forget relevant questions that will later be fundamental for the analysis and discussion of the data. Moreover, the description of this instrument allows the other researchers to follow the same path and confirm the affirmations pointed out in the initial study⁽¹²⁾. In relation to this item, it was verified that 52.12% of the studies mentioned the realization and use of instrument.

Due to the relevance of these instruments, it is necessary that they are validated through pre-tests, in order to guarantee the analysis of the instrument in relation to reliability (it investigates whether the instrument will allow the same results), the validity (necessary to include important new data that has been left out during collection) and operability (whether or not the issues contained in the instrument are easy to understand)⁽¹⁵⁾.

The pilot test is considered an important strategy to assist researchers in validating the instrument that

will be used for data collection. In it, the researcher participates in a test situation, in which he is exposed to characteristics similar to those planned for the research, so that he becomes familiar with the research instrument. After this step, the researcher has the opportunity to discuss with other people about the instrument, analyzing whether the instrument is valid or not, whether modification is necessary, or whether its methodology makes it possible to achieve the research objectives. Thus, it is evident that this type of test is decisive, since it can reveal failures in the structuring of a study that, many times, went unnoticed or was not apparent⁽¹⁶⁾.

Validation consists of analyzing whether the instrument is valid, that is, when its construction and applicability allow the faithful measurement of what is intended to be measured. In relation to this criterion, it was verified that the majority of the studies did not describe the validation process or the use of validated instruments, which can lead to the appearance of risks related to safety and the accuracy in the research development⁽¹⁵⁾.

It is also recommended that the researchers explain in the studies if there was a need to repeat interviews, as this may influence the relationship between researcher and participant, as well as affect the richness of the data obtained⁽⁶⁾. It was noticed that this question is a concern of few researchers, since 12.73% of the authors described the repetition of interviews.

In relation to the recording of data, the use of recorders is the most reliable method to reproduce the answers obtained in each question, due to the fact of preserving the content during the interviews, besides avoiding that a result is not informed by a possible forgetting of the interviewer^(6,17). In addition, it facilitates the analysis step, since the data can be transcribed in detail so that it is possible to capture speed, tone of voice, emphasis and pauses⁽¹⁰⁾. The results are in line with these recommendations, since the majority of researchers (77.15%) opted for the use of recorders.

In addition to recordings, it is common to use field notes, since they make it possible to record everything that is not said by the interviewee, but which is transmitted through their behavior, their speeches, their gestures and their expressions. It was verified that this technique is still not used so much by the researchers, since 30.30% of the researchers described its use, which makes it impossible for the readers to understand the nonverbal language of the

participants and the context of research.

From the analyzed studies, it was verified that 38.65% of the authors described the duration of the interviews, and the lack of this data or the superficiality of it in the studies compromise the quality of data obtained⁽⁶⁾.

Determining the number of interviews or observations required to reach the study goal is a strategic issue for researchers using a qualitative approach. Sometimes, the problem is not the amount of data, but to make sure that the data that has been collected is sufficient to reach the goal proposed in the study⁽¹⁸⁾. From the dissertations analyzed, 25.18% brought the number of interviews and the adopted criteria of data saturation. This result demonstrates the fragility of the studies, since the lack of information about data saturation is capable of generating a negative impact on the validity of the results⁽¹⁹⁾.

The saturation sampling is a conceptual tool that can be used in qualitative investigations, whose purpose is to establish the final size of a sample, interrupting the capture of new data, because the data will present, in the evaluation of the researcher, some redundancy or repetition, and it is not considered productive to persist in data collection⁽¹⁸⁾.

To do so, it is common among research methods that the collection and analysis of data are carried out concomitantly, that is, at each data collection, the researcher must make the analysis to distinguish which elements have appeared and which have been replicated⁽¹⁸⁾.

Some authors adopt the term "close" to the sample, which means to define the set that will support the analysis and interpretation of the data. If there was no exhaustion closure (addressing all eligible subjects), they should justify the interruption of the processing of new observations and the recruitment of new participants, with theoretical saturation being one way of doing so.

With regard to transcription, it is recommended that the testimonies are transcribed shortly after they are closed, preferably by the researchers who perform them, as this allows the researcher to listen to the recording with transcribed text, following up and checking each sentence and the intonation changes⁽²⁰⁾. COREQ recommends that a copy of each transcript is given individually to the study participants so that they carefully read everything that has been reported by them and, if it were necessary, they make the necessary changes, complementing some information already described or correcting something that is

wrong^(6,12). It was verified that only in 3.80% of the dissertations this data appears explicitly. Failure to comply with this criterion may be related to the denial of information previously provided or the lack of reliability of the participants' memory⁽¹⁰⁾.

After the analysis detailed of the methodological design, it was verified that none of the analyzed dissertations presented all the information contained in domain 2, study design, of COREQ.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The data from this study show that the essays of the papers analyzed did not fully meet the criteria established in COREQ's two domain. The main shortcomings are related to the description of the sample and the non-participants, the presence of non-participants during the data collection, the need for repetition of interviews, the saturation of data and the return of transcription of the interviews to the participants. On the other hand, there is compliance in all the dissertations in relation to the description of the methodological orientation, and most of them fulfill

the methods of approach, sample size, configuration and data collection.

In this knowledge-building perspective, it is important to consider the use of these guides in the preparation, development and writing of scientific papers, especially among *Stricto Sensu* graduate programs, in order to contribute to the methodological rigor of qualitative research, in order to the scientific production and the advancement of nursing science.

This study provides contributions to qualitative research to elucidate some of its peculiarities such as methodology, and the potential of COREQ to evaluate the methodological rigor of these studies. It shows the importance of its use in structuring a study with a qualitative approach, thus ensuring greater reliability. The adoption of this guide for the analysis of qualitative studies by some national journals opens the perspective for its translation and validation in the country. As limitations of this study, we highlight the fact that only the COREQ's two domain was used and only the academic master's dissertations of nursing were analyzed.

ANÁLISE DO REFERENCIAL METODOLÓGICO DE DISSERTAÇÕES PELO CONSOLIDATED CRITERIA FOR REPORTING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

RESUMO

Analisar o conteúdo descrito no desenho metodológico das dissertações qualitativas de mestrado acadêmico em enfermagem. Revisão narrativa realizada a partir do portal da Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior. A análise do desenho do estudo foi fundamentada no domínio dois de um instrumento de verificação abrangente para pesquisa qualitativa. Foram selecionadas 683 dissertações. A redação dos trabalhos não cumpriram em sua totalidade os critérios estabelecidos pelo instrumento. As principais lacunas referem-se à descrição da amostragem e dos não participantes, a presença de não participantes no decorrer da coleta de dados, a necessidade de repetição de entrevistas, a descrição dos critérios de saturação de dados, o retorno da transcrição das entrevistas para os participantes. Por outro lado, há o cumprimento na totalidade das dissertações da descrição da orientação metodológica, e em sua maioria há o cumprimento dos métodos de abordagem, do tamanho da amostra, na configuração e na coleta de dados. É importante considerar a utilização destes guias na elaboração, no desenvolvimento e na redação dos trabalhos científicos de modo a contribuir para o rigor metodológico das pesquisas qualitativas.

Palavras-chave: Pesquisa qualitativa. Lista de checagem. Confiabilidade dos dados. Avaliação. Manuais e guias para a gestão da pesquisa.

ANÁLISIS DEL REFERENCIAL METODOLÓGICO DE DISSERTACIONES POR LOS CONSOLIDATED CRITERIA FOR REPORTING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

RESUMEN

Analizar el contenido descrito en el diseño metodológico de las disertaciones cualitativas de maestría académica en enfermería. Revisión narrativa realizada en el portal de la Coordinación de Perfeccionamiento de Personal de Nivel Superior. El análisis del diseño fue fundamentado en el dominio número dos de un instrumento global de verificación para investigación cualitativa. Fueron seleccionadas 683 disertaciones. La redacción de los trabajos no cumplieron en su totalidad los criterios establecidos para el instrumento. Las principales lagunas se refieren a la descripción de la muestra y de los no-participantes, la presencia de no-participantes en el curso de la recogida de datos, la necesidad de repetición de entrevistas, la descripción de los criterios de saturación de datos, la demostración de la transcripción de las entrevistas para los participantes. Por otro lado, hay un cumplimiento en su totalidad de las disertaciones de la descripción de la orientación metodológica, y en su mayoría hay el cumplimiento de los métodos de enfoque, del tamaño de la muestra, en la configuración y en la recogida de datos. Es importante considerar la utilización de estas guías en la elaboración, en el desarrollo y en la redacción de los trabajos científicos con el fin de contribuir para el rigor metodológico de las investigaciones cualitativas.

Palabras clave: Investigación cualitativa. Lista de verificación. Exactitud de los datos. Evaluación. Manuales y guías para la gestión de la Investigación.

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